

Featherstream

Ian / Sutherland / STHIAN001

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Abstract

Featherstream is a romantic suspense novel set at the southernmost tip of Africa during the Second World War. Returning to her father's farm at Cape Agulhas for the university holidays, Anna van der Vliet stumbles on a clandestine operation to provision enemy U-boats. Her dilemma of whether to betray family or country is further complicated when she falls in love with German naval commander Thomas von Eisenheim. Anna goes on to uncover a plot by Nazi Germany and the right-wing Ossewabrandwag organisation to blow up the Union's parliament buildings and install a pro-German Afrikaner government. The novel's landscape ranges from the remote fynbos plains of Agulhas in the Southern Cape, through the Moravian hamlet of Elim to Cape Town. Based on extensive historical research, it explores the deep ideological tensions in South Africa between supporters of the pro-war government of General Jan Smuts and Doctor Daniel Malan's Purified National Party, which were mirrored in communities and families across South Africa. The driving force of the story is a young woman's struggle to reconcile divided loyalties and emerge from the emotional stranglehold of her overbearing father.

Chapter 1

February 5, 1942. The last layer of Anna van der Vliet's stress had long since fallen by the wayside as the bakkie rattled south-east along the jeep track to the foot of Africa. It was five hours since they'd left the ivy walls of her residence in Cape Town to cross Sir Lowry's Pass and the Overberg's sea of wheat hills; two since the lights of Napier faded behind the Akkedisberg. But the moment they passed the first signpost to Rietvlei she tensed.

"You're doing well," she said, turning to the driver when they crossed the first fire break that ran from the slopes of the Soetanysberg, across the field of fynbos, and ended at the coast. "We're almost there."

"Ja." Kleinjan shifted his attention from the penumbra of the bakkie's headlights and faced her. His left hand rested on the steering wheel and his right elbow stuck out of the window. His face, barely higher than the dashboard, cracked into a smile. "I can smell Aasfontein's kelp from here."

"Watch out!" Anna saw two marble eyes shining from the edge of the headlights' range.

Kleinjan swirled to face forward. A fraction later he stamped the brake pedal. The bakkie lurched left, straightened, and veered right. There was a thud on the undercarriage and they shuddered to a standstill in a drift of sand.

"Siestog." Anna dropped to her haunches beside a crumple of fur and limbs that a minute earlier had borne the spirit of a Marsh Hare. She stroked the animal's head several times, muttering a prayer. Then she looked up. "You must drive more carefully, man."

"Sorry Miss Anna..." The driver took off his hat, dropped his chin to his chest and stood silent.

"Don't worry," she said. "It was my fault. I distracted you."

Kleinjan bent down, grabbed the hare's legs and dragged it off the track. He scraped a depression in the sand, then reached for the body.

"No. It's dead, anyway. Keep it."

Kleinjan looked up through the yellow of his eyes. "Thank you," he said. "Hannah will like that." He chucked the hare onto the back of the bakkie. "You know: she makes a lekker rabbit bredie."

"I've heard." Anna bent down to pick a head of ericas and climbed back into the bakkie. "It would be nice to try it some time." She waited for him to start the engine. "Just keep this story between us. We don't want Papa to think you're a poacher, like Dries Roux."

"Ja...Did you hear he shot another leopard? Adult male. Said it took six lambs in a week." Kleinjan paused. "Sorry, Miss Anna... I shouldn't have told you."

"No. That's what I like about you and me, Kleinjan. We don't keep secrets." Something caught her eye. "What's that light?" She pointed across his chest toward the ocean. The water beyond the breaking waves was smooth and lumpy and shimmered in the light of an almost moon. The truck coasted to a halt in a patch of grass to the side of the track.

Kleinjan leaned over the steering wheel and shifted the gear lever into park. "A ship, maybe?"

"With lights?" she said. "Not likely. There are blackouts in place, remember. Also at sea."

"Oh, yes, I'd forgotten. We don't think about the war much here on the vlaktes." Kleinjan switched the ignition key back on. "Come, Miss Anna. Baas Stefan will be angry if we arrive after midnight."

"You worry too much about Papa," she said. "He's not the monster you think he is."

Kleinjan let go of the key and stared at the sea.

"Anyway," she said, "He doesn't even know we're coming tonight, remember."

"That's the problem," said Kleinjan. "Baas Stefan always wants to know what's going on. He'll blame me. He'll..."

"Relax. The surprise was my idea. I'll handle him."

"It isn't that simple. You know what happens..."

Anna pulled her shoulders back, causing her breasts to press against her blouse. She ran her hair through her hands. It was dark as the shadows and longer than she'd ever worn it. "I've changed this past year, you know. Got older for one thing. Twenty in March month: can you believe it?"

"Jho. That's still young."

"You think so?" She sighed. "Most women my age are married."

"It will happen. Don't worry. Just...Be careful, is all I say. Your mother. She..."

"What about her?"

"Nothing." Kleinjan fiddled the key. The starter motor whined but the engine wouldn't take. He tried again with the same result. Then he waited.

"Say what you have to," Anna said. "Mama's been dead ten years. I'm a big girl now."

On the third attempt, the engine took. Kleinjan floored the accelerator. All four wheels spun but the bakkie went nowhere. Leaving the engine idling, he hopped out, grabbed a spade from behind his seat and cleared sand from the front of each tire. Then he broke handfuls of thatch from the side of the road and wedged them in front of the wheels. Back in the truck, he rammed the gear lever into first and they wobbled out of the sand.

The branch of a protea bush scraped against the side of the bakkie. It was like the sound of chalk dragged across a blackboard. After a minute of rumbling along in silence, Anna said, "You were going to say?"

"My job, miss. He'll..."

"Jong. Please. You've worked at Rietvlei for twenty years. Hannah's side for generations. Papa will never..."

Kleinjan floored the accelerator. The bakkie lurched forward, bumped over a rock and sped up. Neither spoke for several minutes.

"Sorry," she said at last. "You're thinking about Willem, aren't you?"

No response.

"I miss him too."

"I know, Miss Anna, I know."

"We just wanted to stay friends."

"Ja. You were always close, nè. Remember when you used to come play by our house after school. Before..."

"I tried to change Papa's mind, but you know what he's like."

The bakkie thudded into a trough causing the wheels to spin. It waved from side to side, found traction and accelerated.

"I got a letter from him last week," Anna said. "Tells me our boys up North are holding the Gazala Line. A place called Sollum."

"That's right. He wrote me too."

"You must be so proud."

"Yes. But he's only driving a truck." He turned to face her. It was like a ghost had run over his grave. Fear had the effect of softening his crisscross of wrinkles. "You know if anyone hears that you and Willem are writing to each other, I'll have more to lose than my job. The Brandwag people, they'll...."

"There you go again: worrying about nothing. They're just bullies."

"That's not what I heard after church last week. Did you know the predikant has his own wireless? Says that way he gets both sides of the story."

"You mean, Radio Zeesen? Surely you people don't..."

"We're Moravian, remember. Did you know we still have a German with us? A missionary."

"Is that right?" she said. "I'm surprised the government hasn't locked him up."

"I don't think anyone in Pretoria cares what goes on in Elim," he said. "We're just simple folk..."

"You're anything but simple, Kleinjan."

"I strayed from the fold, remember. With Hannah, I mean. They've never quite forgiven me...Anyway, I was telling you about the Brandwag: they're saying people are going to die, you know. And Smuts will only have himself to blame."

"Whatever," she said. "That's all happening in the Transvaal. They wouldn't bother with us here in the Strandveld."

"I hope you're right. Did you see the photos in the Bredasdorp News last month? Of Robey Leibrand before he was caught, and his followers. Jislaaik. They're like Nazis. Boots, marching, salutes."

"There," she interrupted. "Did you see that flash? Half a mile out, south-southwest."

They scanned the offing. The section of track they were parked on was seventy feet above sea level and a half mile from the shoreline. Even from there the crashing of waves on the rocks was like the rumble of a thousand lions.

"Oh. There. Ja. I see it."

The light appeared from the ink, winked three times, stopped. On for a second, off, on again. Anna flicked a strand of hair from her face. "Wait." She rummaged in her bag, pulled out her diary and pencil. She strained her eyes toward where the light had come from. On. Off. On-off-on-off...On-off...

"Magtig," Anna said. "Too fast." She scribbled down fragments. There was more flashing, faster now. Then darkness.

Kleinjan looked at her with the same patient, seaweed eyes that had seen her take her first steps.

She replaced the notebook in her bag and looked up. "Yes," she said. "I still keep my diary. In fact there's not a day goes by I don't write in it."

Kleinjan nodded, his eyebrows raised in half-moons.

"Yes. My prayers too."

The scent of buchu and camphor filled the cab in the silence.

She tugged at the door handle. "One minute. I need to stretch." She stepped out onto the side railing, arms resting on the roof of the bakkie and took in the sweep of the horizon. On her far right was the gold stain of Quoin Rock Lighthouse. From there the coastline saw-toothed a hundred and eighty miles to the smile of Brandfontein Beach and the backside of the southernmost cape of Africa.

Another flash. This one from the dunes. On-off, on-off.

"Everything all right?" Kleinjan called.

"I'm thinking, that's all." Anna kept scanning the horizon. Left to right. Right to left. Then she saw another light, this one from the shore. Same sequence. When it faded the darkness seemed blacker than before.

There was little doubt the light was coming from the five square mile expanse of sand dunes the locals called the Sahara. The first dune rose just beyond the spring tide mark; the last was a stone's throw from Dries Roux's ramshackle homestead. For a moment she thought of the afternoons as a child, when her older brothers still deigned to play with their laatlammetjie sister, surfing down the slopes on flattened cardboard. Then she remembered the sequence she'd just seen, replaying it on the canvass of her mind. The demonstration classes at university had been months before and then only scratched the surface. But Anna had seen enough to know that it was Morse code.

Chapter 2.

Anna had heard her father speak in the tongue of his exile before, but this time it was different. She stopped midway across the floor of the voorkamer. In front of her was the wall where a photograph of her mother had once hung. Pipe-smoked whispers drifted through the doorway from the sitting room to her left. The only other sounds were the distant grumble of the ocean outside, and the ticking of the grandfather clock at her ear.

She could just make out a male voice, younger than her father's, with an air of authority. She rested her suitcase on the floor. Then another man, younger still. At first the sounds were too muffled to constitute sentences and she could ignore her inkling. But when the time the clock chimed half to midnight, Anna's heart stopped for a second. She'd heard enough. They were speaking German.

"Who's there?" Her father said, switching to Afrikaans.

Anna cringed, a little girl again.

"Hannah?" he called. "If it's you, leave the wood outside, on the stoep. And close the front door. Make quick."

Anna edged towards the sitting room doorway, feeling like she did on one of her many visits to the principal's office at Bredasdorp Primary. She peered around the corner before entering.

They were seated in a half-moon about the kaggel, with her father to one side. A rooikrans flame purred and spat from behind the grating. It was strange: a fire was a rare sight at Rietvlei in February. Not because it never got cold or wet in summer: a frontal system could stray north from the roaring forties at any time of the year and lick the toe of Africa. It was just that her father would never volunteer the luxury of a fire without good reason.

The stranger in the centre of the semicircle stood up. He was six feet tall and lean in his clothes with a blonde beard and his presence filled the room.

"Engel." Her father, still seated, inspected the rim of his pipe. He'd switched to English for the benefit of his guests. "What are you doing here? I thought you were at your friend Loubser's house till the day after tomorrow?"

"Lombard," she said. "Sofia Lombard."

"Loubser. Lombard. Whatever."

"I thought I'd surprise you, Papa. Aren't you pleased to see me?"

"That Kleinjan..." He flicked a leaf of tobacco from the top of his pipe into the fire. "I'll bliksem him."

"Ag, Papa, it was my idea. Promise." She glanced in the direction of the guests without making eye contact.

Her father pressed a palm of tobacco into the top of his pipe. Doubled up in his armchair, his thighs were well above his knees. The toes of his size thirteen boots almost reached the kaggel. He waved the back of his hand in the direction of his guests. "This is Kurt, and Thomas. They're from Windhoek, on business."

Anna nodded at them, turned back to her father. "Can't we start off on a better note," she said. "We haven't seen each other for months."

Without lifting his head he looked up at her. The whites of his eyes reflected the dance of the flames. "If you missed me so much you'd have stayed with me on the farm your whole vacation. Instead you decide to come now only, to grace us with your presence for all of a week before you bugger off again."

"But aren't you going back to Parliament next week, anyway?"

"That's different. It's my job."

Anna ironed a crinkle from the front of her dress. "Aren't you happy I've made friends at university?" she said.

"Boyfriends, you mean. I bet they're taking you to dance halls. Vieslik"

Anna's eyes fell to the floor. When she looked up the pipe smoke had cleared. The other stranger was seated with one leg over his knee, hands folded. His face, soft and blushed, was the kind that made a man look younger than his years. But beyond the innocent façade, there was something sinister about him. She said, "Didn't you get my letter?"

"You wrote me?" He raised his left eyebrow to form a Cape Dutch gable. "I thought you were too busy and important to indulge your father like that."

"I sent it two weeks ago. Union Mail. Surely..."

"Slim Jannie's censors must have it," he said. "Though you'd think they'd have bigger fish to fry these days." He turned to the standing guest. "Like fighting our old enemy's battles."

The taller guest didn't respond. Instead he turned to Anna. There were chevrons about his lips and his smile was disarming. Then he stepped forward and offered her his hand. "Thomas."

Anna cast a glance at her father. No response. Back to the stranger. Studying his face from close up, she realised his beard had made him look older than he was. She accepted his hand. "Anna," she said. "I'm the daughter."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," he said. His accent was almost as English as that of her art history lecturer. Professor Pickford-Dunn had been at Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship for little more than three years but had become more English than King George. There was a joke doing the gossip rounds that he'd left Cape Town a Pickford and returned—still unmarried—a Pickford-Dunn.

Her father cleared his throat. It sounded like a rasp on the bark of a pine. He said, "Thomas says they've figured a way of importing harvesters from Europe. If only they weren't so expensive."

"Hah," Thomas said. "That's what they all say. Until they start using it."

Her father sighed. "I'd like to believe you," he said. "But with Smuts' control boards I can't see how its going to be possible to lay hands on the stuff. Daai bliksem." He pointed to a riempie stoel by the far wall as if he was about to invite her to join them, then changed his mind.

Anna turned to the other stranger. He stood with reluctance and offered a limp hand. He was an inch shorter than Thomas and though also lean his face was plumper about the jowls. His hairline receded almost to his crown and his eyes were set so deep it was impossible to tell if there was life in them.

"My partner, Kurt," Thomas said. "He's the strong and silent type". Without waiting for a response he turned back to Anna. "So, Stefan tells me you are studying Fine Art. How delightful."

She glanced at her father. What was going on? How could he allow such a young man to address him by his first name? She said, "And languages."

Thomas asked a question with his eyebrows. Then he said, "I believe Stellenbosch is an excellent university. Produced some great statesmen. Louis Botha, Jan Smuts..." He turned to Anna's father. "And the really smart ones, I believe you said. Like D.F. Malan."

"Actually," Anna said. "I'm at UCT." She reached over and tonged a log into the fire. "That's the University of Cape Town."

Anna's father rummaged in his trouser pocket, pulled a match from a box of Springboks. The emblem of the Union army on its side seemed out of place in a staunchly nationalist home. He struck the match on the side of his chair and it flared. Holding the flame over the top of his pipe he puffed at the mouthpiece. "It was at her mother's request," he said, spitting a wad of tobacco into the fire. It sizzled for a second then burst into flame. "I tried to tell Julia the place was a nest of communists. But she wouldn't listen. Never did." He turned to Anna. "She thought I was against it because I hate rooinekke."

"But you do," Anna said.

"Ag, you know that's rubbish." Stefan turned to Thomas, then back at his daughter. "Your mother was English. An aristocrat, nogal. Why would I have married her if I hate them so much?"

Anna turned to the fire to hide her tears. For a moment she was building sandcastles on Struisbaai Beach. Being shown how to fix a hem with the Singer. Listening to a chapter of the Water-Babies in melody before goodnight prayers. Though the sickness had been long enough for many a goodbye, there hadn't been a day in the ten years since her mother's passing away that Anna hadn't ached for one last touch.

"I'm sure you're hungry after the long ride," her father said, eyes pointing to the kitchen. "There's still some bobotie. And Hannah's bread is fresh out of the oven. Only brown bread of course." He looked at the seated stranger. "Smuts even has to deprive us hard-working wheat farmers of the fruit of our labours." A shadow passed over his face. "Bloody Hensopper."

"Ag, Papa," she said. "You yourself used to say he was our greatest general after de Wet, that we would have lost the second war of independence a year earlier without him."

He brushed her toward the kitchen with the back of his hand as if waving off a fly. "Listen. Don't get me started."

Anna turned back to the three men, not caring any longer that she'd been crying. She looked from one to the other. "All right. Looks like you gentlemen need some privacy." She started toward the kitchen then stopped, turned, and fixed on Kurt. "Are you two staying the night?"

The younger stranger's face was as expressionless as a rubber duck in a bath. He looked at his colleague.

Thomas cleared his throat. "Our first meeting is at the Overberg Co-op. Two pm."

"Well then," Anna said. "I'll go check on the rooms." She looked at her father. "Do you want them to stay in the cottage or by Frans' bedroom in the main house?"

“Thanks, Engel,” her father said. “The guest quarters will do. And don’t worry: just shout for Hannah.” He stood. “Where is she? Bliksem. Gone home already, I bet. We have visitors, for heaven’s sake.” He faced his guests. “I’m sorry, our lodgings are basic. But trust me: they’re better than the Victoria Hotel.”

When Anna realised that the three men were looking at her she felt light-headed. The room swayed and then started to rotate about her. It had been a strange two hours. Flashing lights, two visiting misfits, stumbling on a conversation in German. For the first time since the tea break in Caledon that afternoon she felt hungry. It was always like that when she got to Rietvlei. Something about the freshest air in the world, the smell of yeast drifting in from the kitchen, the promise of a fynbos-scented bath.

On the way to the kitchen Anna brushed past the coffee table. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed two sheaves of paper. They’d been folded but now lay open. A year ago she wouldn’t have thought twice of the emblem above the typewriting. An ox wagon and rifle: so what? She closed the kitchen door behind her and steadied herself with a hand on the table. Pots, ladles, the Aga stove circled. She sat, put her head in her hands. Just a half hour ago she’d chided Kleinjan for being paranoid. Now the image was scalding her consciousness. It was the insignia of the Ossewa Brandwag.

Chapter 3

Anna woke when the first hint of dawn had just started to brown the night and the Soetanyberg was still a smudge on her window. Her neck muscles tensed, causing her head to rise an inch from her pillow. A whine, far off or in her dreams? She waited. Nothing. Then a familiar *hoo-hoo* from outside, close by under the eaves. Her head fell back on the pillow. *Hoo hoo* again, this one higher-pitched. She guessed it came from the wild fig tree on the werf. Cape Eagle Owls. Mama used to say that if they chose to roost by your house in summer the year would be blessed.

An orchestra of sparrows was warming up outside on the werf, and a cock began to crow from beyond the workers' cottages. Anna focused through the window. It was light enough to make out the rhinoceros head silhouette of the mountain and the remains of the stone wall that traversed its breadth. The Van Bredas, who once owned much of the vlaktes, had built the structure to contain their flock with the aid of a pack of sheep dogs which roamed the plains. Then she thought, again, of the strangers: Papa had called them colleagues. So why hadn't she met them before? There was no getting back to sleep.

She sat at her triptych and looked in the mirror. Her hair, as always in the morning, a tangle about her shoulders. She shivered. The image was back. It had flickered on her subconscious through the night. His eyes, intense as a hunter sizing its prey. She ran her brush through her hair three times, stood, and straightened her dress. It was crumpled but clean. She gathered her sandals, left the door open and tip-toed down the passage. When she got to the sitting room she looked about. A sepia photograph caught her eye. It was a Boer in a veld hat, Mauser slung across his chest. It was as though he was staring back at her, his face gaunt and accusing. She shivered herself to the present. The coffee table was clear. There was no sign of the papers.

Outside, the sky was baked in the glow of sunrise. The sparrows were in Act Two of their symphony, now joined by the finches in the Melkboom hedge about the werf. There was an urgency to their playing, as if they knew that time was of the essence; that by mid-morning the wind would be up and drive all but the Strandveld's hardiest to shelter.

Anna stopped below a branch of the wild fig tree and surveyed the yard. It was deserted. Papa would be on the lands. Perhaps hurtling along dirt roads and jeep tracks at this very moment, Kleinjan and the other workers bouncing about on the back of the bakkie. There'd be fences to mend, pipes to lay; there was always work to be done at Rietvlei. And then, at nine-thirty they'd be back in a cloud of dust for breakfast. Three rashers of bacon, two eggs sunny side up for the lord of the manor, a pot of coffee black and bitter. And God forbid if it wasn't ready.

The caw of a peacock above made her almost jump. She hurried past the outbuildings to the reservoir and stopped at the water's edge. The inlet stream trickled from the end of an asbestos hose and shattered the surface. She watched her hands sink and distend beneath her reflection. The water was cold and sweet as it splashed her face, and she shuddered as it ran down her neck and spread across her chest. Finished, she stared ahead of her at a clearing in the bush which marked the start of the dune walk.

Papa had forbidden her to go to the beach alone as a child and the horror stories of drunk workers and rape still haunted her. The path was only five hundred yards but as she trudged along the corridor of sand it was easy to imagine it would go on forever. Only when the track veered sharp

right at the end of the walk and the cliffs dropped away to the sea did she notice the prints. She stooped to inspect. Two sets. One deeper and larger by half. Both headed to the beach.

The tide was almost full and a head of foam surged up the beach toward the flotsam that marked the previous high tide. Anna stopped at the first cluster of rocks, breathing hard. Three months of lectures, assignments and late nights out had taken their toll on her fitness. The four miles to the point and back would take at least two hours in the soft sand. She turned and headed back along the beach toward the rocky coast beyond the dune path.

"Shouldn't you be sleeping, after your long journey last night?"

Anna spun to her right. Thomas. After a night of imagining, he looked strangely familiar. He was sitting on the scraggly ridge of a dune, twenty yards beyond the high water mark. On his lap was a jumbled ball of rope. He picked at a loose end with one hand.

"What are you doing here?" Anna said, berating herself for not noticing him before.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you."

"I'm a farm girl," she said. "I don't frighten that easily. Tell, me. Your English is very good for a German-speaking South Wester?"

Thomas laughed. "You noticed. There's a tradition in our family of sending the boys to public school in England. Yes, I know, all the way from Africa, it was hard. But I had no choice. My forebears were adel. Von Eisenheim."

"I have the same burden." Her smile lacked conviction. "Except in this country, aristocracy is an illusion built on race."

Thomas plucked a loose end of the rope. "It's not much different in South West."

"I see." Anna held up her hand to shield her eyes from the sun. "So, where's your friend? The quiet one."

"Sleeping, I suppose," he said. "Why do you ask?"

Anna pointed toward the path. "Two footprints."

"I'm impressed. Rather observant for a farm girl." He dropped the rope. "All right. He's gone with your father. Wanted to go see the flock. In our business it's best to know your customer intimately."

"Of course," Anna said. "You're trying to convince Papa to buy some new equipment we don't need."

"Mechanisation," he said. "You can double a farm's annual output, you know."

"And why would we need to do that? We have everything we need here at Rietvlei."

"Its happening in every industry. One has to keep up. In Europe they..."

"We're in Africa. We have the volk."

"The volk?" Thomas said. He wiped his hand on his thigh. "Your father sees things differently. Says labour in South Africa is only going to get more expensive as the war continues. And then there is the threat of unions..."

"Our workers wouldn't be interested," she said. "They've lived peacefully on our land for generations."

Thomas stood. He was wearing khaki trousers, a size too large. They looked like her father's. Perhaps they were. There were two rolls at the ankles to keep them off the sand. "Excuse me," he said. "I'd better return to the homestead. There's correspondence to catch up on before breakfast." He started for the dune path. "Please," he waved her forward. "After you."

Anna tried not to blush. There was something about the stranger that excited her. Something edgy and unpredictable, beneath his diffidence.

"Please."

She hesitated. The tendrils of guilt that had probed her so many times during her year of freedom were back. Dominee de Wet's admonition was never far from a whisper. The danger of being alone, unchaperoned, with a man. "Thanks," she said. "But I need some time by myself. You know, lots to think about."

Thomas laughed. "That's fine. I won't take it personally." Then he looked perplexed. Closed his eyes.

It took her several seconds to hear it. A faint drone, rising from the west but still shielded by the mountain.

"Wait," he said, throwing his neck back and tracking the sky from its apogee to the horizon. The sound was easily discernible above the rumble of the waves. "That's a Junkers." He sucked air through his lips and listened again. "Yes. 86Z. German? What is—?"

"Relax," she laughed. "We're not about to be blitzed." The plane was visible now, a fixed wing snake eagle approaching them head on. "It's just the air force's coastal reconnaissance patrol. They're flying almost every day now."

"All the way from Cape Town?" Thomas kept staring at the plane.

"Sometimes. There's also a landing strip this side of Bredasdorp. I'm not sure about this one."

"What are they looking for?" He was standing arms akimbo, facing her again.

"Looking for? Where've you been?"

"South West." He smiled.

"Of course." Anna laughed, then surveyed the offing. "How could I forget? You know, every other day there's a report in the local papers about someone sighting a German raider. Or a U-boat. The folk are obsessed. Last month someone even claimed to have spotted a Japanese submarine."

"That is not surprising," he said. "With Pearl Harbour. Now Singapore."

"Ja. But how they tell the difference between a German and Japanese periscope is beyond me."

"The Japanese boats are longer and faster," he said. "But there's no way they could be operating this far west already..." Thomas let his arms fall to his sides. "Anyway. That's what I read." He shrugged. "But how would I know?"

A line of white water rolled up the beach past Anna's ankles bearing a jelly fish leached by a horde of sea snails. She watched the snails burrow into the gel. "We have a saying in English...It says time and tide—"

"Wait for no man." Thomas said, exploring her eyes.

"Now *that's* impressive." Anna laughed. The silence that settled between them felt comfortable, like she'd known him for years. She didn't want to leave. She gazed at the candy floss mist that still hovered over the water. An oystercatcher cheeped overhead. "Excuse me," she said. "I'm going to try the coast walk today. Change of routine."

He straightened. "Are you sure?"

Anna looked at his feet. He was wearing brown leather boaters without socks. His legs had a slight bow at the knees – it could have been the angle he was standing – but he stood firm and erect. He was wearing a white T-shirt, the type her father wore beneath his long sleeve shirt in winter. It hung loose and had an old-fashioned look about it, but he wore it well. "Why?" she said. "Is that a problem?"

"Oh. Nothing. It's just that Stefan told me it was dangerous."

"Ha. Let me guess: he said not to go beyond the rocks? Papa's got a rule for everything. It drove me mad growing up. But I guess that was his way of coping as a widower."

"You would know better than I do," Thomas said. "But he seemed to take the idea of danger seriously."

"I'll take my chances. Won't you tell Papa that I may be a few minutes late for breakfast?"

Anna stopped at the barbed wire fence. Her father erected it before her mother died. The first skirmish in a campaign to extinguish the past. In front of her hung a wind bleached sign, the writing barely legible. "Private Property. Trespassers will be prosecuted." Another, this one rust-pocked, said "Danger. Gevaar." She found the midpoint between posts and tramped her foot on the second strand. Her leg was shaking. She lifted the top wire, crouched double, then hesitated. Why had she told the stranger where she was going? Papa would explode. He'd warned her so many times never to stray beyond the wire. Said the rocks were too dangerous, a ships' graveyard, and too many snakes.

Kleinjan once told her that after a half mile scramble from the fence was a cove. Skulpiestrand, his ancestors called it. Said before the white man came one could find pansy shells washed up in droves. That the Dutch East India Company had built a cottage there for shipwreck survivors to hole up in. Even as a child, it had sounded to Anna like a tall story, but she'd never dared to disprove it.

After an hour of clambering and beating a path through the bush, she stopped to allow her heart rate to slow. Bending, she ran her hands down her shins. At places the skin was scratched to red. It occurred to her then how few signs of life there had been. Not a seal. Not a Black Oystercatcher. Not even a seagull. It was like that silence in a forest after a hunter has taken a shot. She looked up at the sun. It was well clear of the Soetanytsberg. She swallowed her thirst, thinking how clear the water back at the reservoir had looked.

Anna was beginning to doubt the accuracy of the legend of the Beach of Shells. Kleinjan was a consummate story teller and not immune to flights of imagination. She reached a ledge and probed the rock face above her and stuck her right hand in a cleft until it throbbed at the knuckles. One foot up, wedged in a hole, a final heave. She flopped on the slab, breathing hard again. After a few seconds the rock became unbearably hot so she kept moving. After crawling to the edge, she stopped and peered over.

The cove was a three-quarter moon with the beach ending at a narrow slipway. The landward side of the beach was ringed by kelp, then bush. Anna slid scrambled down the steep slope on all fours.

Anna crunched shells along the beach, eyes fixed on the sand in front of her. No signs of Pansies. Not even bright colours. She got down on her haunches and rummaged. Only mussels and perlemoen fragments. When her thighs started aching she stood and looked about. The beach was divided in two parts lengthways: the one nearest the water was steep and packed with pebbles: the other had a gentle slope with a swathe of sand bordered at the high water mark by shells and kelp. Nothing unusual for a small, protected beach. She scanned left to right. A wave was testing the dividing line. Then she saw it.

The sand on the last thirty yards of the beach before the slipway was scuffed. From a distance it looked like an overgrazed paddock churned by a herd of cows. When she got closer, Anna noticed the disturbed area formed a rectangle. One of its lengths was bounded by the strip of shells, the other the sea. She approached the nearest corner cautiously. It was unmistakable. Only a human could...

Urrrrgh. Anna spun around. A sound of wood on metal. Couldn't see anything. An echo? She turned about again. A cottage, guano-splattered on stone, stood on the far end of the slipway. Why hadn't she noticed it before? She felt scared for the first time, wishing she had listened to her father. But there was no turning back now. She walked closer, heart in her mouth. The structure had two windows and a low doorway. *Urrrrgh.* A door, weathered beyond its paint, swung open.

It was too dark to see whether there was anything inside. A breeze tugged at her skirt. No choice but to enter. She started at a rustle behind the door, called out, "Who's there?" Behind her a wave gurgled over the watershed and then sucked itself to silence. She picked up a pebble and tossed it through the doorway. Nothing. She ventured her head beneath the lintel, temporarily blinded by the dark. If there was a window in the hut it must have been boarded. Two steps and she was inside. The floor was of pitted aggregate with a scattering of shells. As she waited the door creaked closed to leave a wireframe of light. Then her throat was burning and she tried to swallow her thirst. For a moment she was four again, pounding at the inside of the closet, her brothers off laughing down the stairs.

Only much later did Anna remember why she had run. It had been something soft, probably a bird, slamming her face. A cry, not hers. Then a groping at the door, ripping it to open to a blinding light of day. And a desperate charge to put distance on the cottage.

The first clue she was awake was the sand fly. It hopped from her lower lip to her upper, and ran along her cheek. She waved it away. Another, this one also silent, itching her ear. She tried to move her right hand but it was caught between a rock and a tangle of kelp. She yanked. Nothing. She found her other hand and used it to daub her cheek. There was something sticky that could only be blood.

Anna opened an eye. The sun was at ten o'clock and angry but the wind was up from the sea. The glare was so bad she had to shield her eyes with her palm. She worked her way to her feet, relieved that both arms were free and moving. She picked through the kelp until she found the rock of the slipway. She followed it until the spring tide mark where the concrete disappeared under a layer of buffalo grass and vyggies. Soon she was in the hardscrabble of Renosterbos. She had no thought of scratches or snakes, just the certainty that if she kept going toward the mountain she'd eventually cross the road.

Clunk. Her foot caught on something hard. She stopped, and scanned the ground. Nothing. She kicked about in the undergrowth. Something solid. She reached down. An oar. Wood-leached and salted. She scanned the bush. Nothing. A chorus of Cicadas started from a Port Jackson thicket. Then she noticed some Renosterbos ahead had been flattened. Was it an overgrown jeep track? She stepped into the middle of it, and looked back. She was on the outside arc of a ninety degree curve. The far end joined the top of the slipway; the other headed in the direction of the homestead.

She heard the diesel engine first. Then the Chevy bounced into view with her father at the wheel. His expression was thunder. Thomas was next to him. Even from twenty yards off his stare looked wild and intense from beneath his fringe.

The truck shuddered to a stop, radiator hissing.

"What the hell are you doing out this side?" her father said, towering over her.

"I'm sorry."

"What's this? He prodded at her dress. Blood?" He was his full six foot five now, chest puffed and eyes set back by the tilt of his head.

"I tripped." Anna was trembling. It had started in her legs. At first she thought it must be from all the walking. Soon it was her whole body. She hugged herself.

"How many times did I warn you not to do this walk?" He was in her space now, shaking. He bunched his right fist, relaxed it. "Bad things have happened there." His expression was like that of a face about to sneeze. "If you try that again I'll..."

"Like I told you, Stefan," Thomas said. He'd appeared behind her father. "She was going to do the dune walk. It was me who dared her to give the coast a try." He stepped out from the bigger man's shadow and placed a hand on his wrist.

Anna waited for the inevitable. No-one ever touched her father when he was mad and got away with it.

Her father let his arm drop to his side. Then he turned his back on the younger man until he was face to face with his daughter. He looked down at the blood stains, and back at her. "You're lucky it wasn't worse. Don't you ever..."

Thomas stepped between them. His forehead was level with her father's chin. "I said it was my fault."

Her father rose on the balls of his feet. Head tilted back as if he might be trying to see past his nose. His hands by his sides were so large they could have been mistaken for boxing gloves. He was about to say something but stopped. "Come, my girl," he said. "Let's get back. Hannah's kept you some eggs and bacon."

They bumped along the track to the chug and tick of the truck's diesel engine. Anna felt her eyelids droop - the left, as always, falling faster. It was a quirk she'd inherited from her mother and—she was told—her grandmother. "There were people on beach," Anna said. "Lots of them."

They rounded a bend in silence.

"Come again," her father said. The road straightened. They were passing through a forest of thatch bushes, tall as a man. According to Kleinjan, the previous owners of the farm had planted in an

attempt to grow it commercially. "You saw people? Back at Brandfontein, I presume. Must have been those fishermen we saw yesterday. Right, Thomas."

"No," she said. "It was the beach at the end of the coast walk. The steep one with all the shells."

"Skulpiestrand?" he said. "That's impossible..."

Anna lowered her head. She wiped her hands on her dress and let them rest on her lap. "I never actually *saw* them," she said.

"Hah. There you go."

"But there were footprints. Everywhere. I promise."

"Here." Her father passed her a bottle. He tilted his head to catch the full face of the sun. "It's hot as hell. You must be dehydrated by now."

"You don't believe me, do you?" she said. The truck trundled on. "I'm telling you." She unscrewed the cap and lifted the water bottle to her mouth and took a swig. When she'd wiped her mouth, she said. "It was like people had been playing soccer on the beach."

"Now you're bordering on the ridiculous."

"Ag, Papa. Why don't you believe me? I'm not a little girl anymore."

He shrugged. More silence.

When the bakkie swerved to avoid a sinkhole Anna felt Thomas' knee press up against hers. She shifted to break contact. He glanced her way. Was there a smile? The car surged over a level stretch of fire break. For a moment they were heading at right angles to the coast and away from it. The bend must have arrived sooner than her father figured because he only started braking in the turn and the three of them were thrust up against each other. When the car straightened Anna had only one thing on her mind: that Thomas' leg was still pressing on hers and she didn't want it to stop. He must have been thinking along the same lines because neither moved.

"Your father's got a point," he said, without looking away. "People imagine all sorts of things when they're dehydrated. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. I've seen it happen with hardened men."

Anna withdrew her leg. Then, resting a hand on the gear lever, she swivelled ninety degrees to face her father. "Let's go back. Please. You can see for yourselves."

"No good." Her father cocked his head down and squinted out the window. "It's past high tide. Even if there had been foot prints they'll be gone by now. Which reminds me..." He fumbled for his fob watch. Balancing it on the base of the steering wheel, he said, "Here now, Thomas: we'd better leave within the hour if we want to get you to your meeting in Bredasdorp." He reached across and slapped Anna's thigh. "Relax, my girl," he said. "I'll check it out tomorrow. Promise."

The bush opened up around the truck. They were approaching a rocky patch in the road.

"Watch out," Anna yelled. She was pointing at the centre rise of the track. A tortoise, thirty yards ahead, inched over a stone. It poked its bald head out and back, as if struggling to drag its chequered load. As they approached she said, "Ag. Isn't he cute?"

"Ha," her father said. For a second the truck veered to the right until its left wheels ran along the middle section. Then he accelerated.

"Papa...No."

The tortoise disappeared under the chassis. She waited with horror for the sound of popping.

"Missed," he said as they both glanced back. "Toe maar, Engel. I was only joking."

"Why do you do things like that?" Anna shifted away from her father. Her knee brushed against Thomas' thigh again. She held it there until the truck sunk back into the tracks. "I mean, even pretend. A tortoise never did a man any harm."

"Who says?" Her father said. "The buggers bring the rain."

They were between thickets of Port Jackson. A bend, then straight and the winged face of a windmill appeared above a copse of trees. They came to a gate. "Leave it to me," Thomas said and leaped out. He dragged the gate across the sand until it was at right angles to the fence.

Her father rammed the gear lever in park. "Did I tell you the Prinsloos are coming to dinner tonight?" he said. "No? Well, good news: Fanus will be there too." He studied her face. "He got back from Stellenbosch this morning."

Thomas waved them through the gate. As they passed, he tipped his hand to his forehead and bowed.

Anna watched through the rear view mirror as he drew the gate closed. When he'd looped the chain over the fence pole, he stooped to align the male and female parts of the padlock.

"What's wrong," her father said. "I thought you'd be pleased. He's such a well-brought-up boy...Did I tell you his father is already making plans to retire? Soon the lad will have both farms to himself. And the quarry."

"He's boring."

"But you haven't given him a proper chance."

"Why should I? He's a fascist."

"Come now."

"It's an open secret he's an Assistant Commandant in the OB."

"Hugg. What makes you think they even exist down here in the Overberg?"

"He'll form his own commando if he has to," she said. "He's a fanatic."

"Ag. Please. You think anyone who doesn't agree with this illegitimate government of ours is a Nazi." He patted her on the leg. "Foeitog. You've only been at UCT a year and those Engelsmanne have brainwashed you."

"I can think for myself."

"Listen," he said. "You'd better behave yourself tonight. Do you have any idea how much the Prinsloos contributed to my election campaign in '38?"

"You don't tell me those sort of details, remember. I'm old enough for you to marry me off but not to trust me with something as mundane as finances."

He waited a moment. "I've also invited Dominee de Wet," he said. "You know how you two love to talk religion."

Anna looked at her father. He was a tough man but he tried. Though he'd lost his faith, he respected her views to the point of encouraging them. It was hard to stay angry with him for long. She glanced at the rear view mirror. Thomas had the padlock and chain in his hand. For a moment their eyes met in the reflection. "What about your guests?" she said. "You're not going to let them eat at the hotel, are you?"

"Well..."

Thomas swung into the seat next to Anna.

Her father shoved the gear lever into first. "I've invited them to stay until we return to Cape Town next week," he said. "Isn't that right, Thomas?"

"What was that?"

"You remember: we talked about the Prinsloos last night. Got the second biggest herd of Merinos this side of the Hottentots Holland. Not to mention the Durbanville wine farm and quarry. A man in your trade would be mad not to want to meet him."

Thomas stroked his chin. "Of course. It would be my pleasure. But Kurt..."

The thatched roof of the homestead appeared above the bush. Anna said, "Your colleague isn't very talkative, is he?"

"He's shy, that's all, especially around the ladies." Thomas laughed. "No. Seriously. He would have loved to attend, but unfortunately he's been detained in Bredasdorp. Some rich farmer says the shearers we sold him are jamming. You know what it's like. They crack the whip, you jump."

"But we could send Kleinjan to fetch him," Anna said. "Dinner's only at eight."

They burst out of the last bushes and onto the werf. The roofs of the outbuildings shimmered above the gravel. Within seconds they had skidded to a halt under the fig. After the dust cloud had passed over them, Thomas said, "That is most kind of you to offer..." He stroked his chin with the tip of his index finger and thumb. It was as though he was waiting for words to catch up with his thoughts. "But he has a meeting. In Cape Town. Tomorrow afternoon. He should stay over at the hotel to catch the first bus in the morning."

Chapter 4

When Anna had finished placing the silver on the table she withdrew her head to avoid the chandelier and straightened. Her back was stiff from being on her feet all afternoon. First it was rearranging the furniture, then supervising Hannah in the kitchen, then helping her father with the seating arrangements. By the time she'd bathed, dressed and returned to check on Hannah's roast, it was almost seven o'clock.

The dining table was so long legend had it her father, after buying it at auction, had to saw it in three to manoeuvre it into the room. Sixteen yellowwood chairs were arranged around the periphery - the one at the far end unused in the ten years since the night the woman of the home died. Anna could still remember the meaty smell of the frikadelle she'd been frying on the Aga before the doctor called from her mother's bedroom.

"Miss Anna...Miss—"

"What is it?" As Anna swung about her elbow collided with Hannah's shoulder. "Gats," she said. "You mustn't creep up on me like that." Then she placed her hand on Hannah's forearm. "Sorry. Are you all right?"

"No, everything is good, Miss Anna." Hannah looked toward the voorkamer. "The first guests have arrived. A shiny Bedford."

"That will be the Prinsloos." Anna pinched her dress at the waist and hitched it to make sure the hems cleared the floor. She pointed at the butter dish. "Quickly. Fill that. And two more red wines for the table. Then. Go call Papa. Hurry. And his guest." When Hannah had left, Anna hastened through to the voorkamer. Through the closed door she could hear Kleinjan's greeting. Doors opening. Shutting. She approached the oval mirror stand on the sideboard. The Prinsloos were on the stoep, complaining about the condition of the roads. She looked at her reflection. The heave of her corset, the pendant nestled between her breasts, a trace of lipstick. It was the body of a woman still playing the role of dutiful child. The innocent face of her father's war for votes. Then there was a scraping of shoes on the mat. And a presumptuous rap.

"To the country," her father said in affected English, raising his crystal of Cabernet Sauvignon. On the wall behind him was a painting of the Prodigal Son, his favourite. It had been a confirmation present from his adoptive father in Munich. Rumour had it that it was a Caravaggio. That may have been true but the canvas itself was anonymous.

Her father looked each of his guests in the eye in turn as they clinked glasses. He started and ended with Hester Prinsloo. As always, the most attractive female guest was seated on his right. She was one of those wealthy Afrikaner women who wear a lot of make-up because they can rather than need to.

Her husband, Koos, held up his glass and swirled the liquid into the light of the chandelier. Then he held it to his nose and sniffed, one eye on the bottle. "Ah. We have KWV tonight," he said. Though his accent was thick he spoke passable English. He quaffed the wine. "You're treating us tonight, my friend. I didn't know you had a quota?"

"I didn't either," her father said. "Until last December. As always, it's who you know."

Koos chuckled. "How could I forget? You're a politician."

"And a farmer." Stefan swept the room with his glass. "Though sometimes I ask myself why I go to all this trouble to eke a living from this barren Strandveld. It's like pulling teeth."

"So, tell me," Koos said. The vertical furrows on either side of his mouth deepened. "Why toast the country? Wasn't it always the Prime Minister?"

Her father looked like he'd swallowed vinegar. "When it was Hertzog I could still stomach it," he said. "But Smuts...To think he was once our greatest hope."

"Ja." Koos shook his head. "I still can't believe it happened."

"What do you mean?"

"The vote, of course. We depended on you Malan boys to keep us out of the war." His eyes shifted to the opposite wall which was adorned with black and white photographs of sittings of parliamentary proceedings. He lingered on a close-up party caucus of the Purified Nationalists. White, balding males, many with glasses. "Now we're playing Britain's lapdog. Again."

"That was two and a half years ago," her father said. "And we did what we could. Still do. You know that. We just didn't have the numbers."

"Ja, ja," Koos put his glass on the table. "I know. I'm just giving you a hard time. But really, with all that money pouring into the party, you'd have thought..."

"Don't worry," her father said. "We're on the offensive. Daniel's got two new bills up his sleeve for next week's sessions at Parliament. Mixed marriages are soon going to be a thing of the past. Just watch."

There was a shuffling of feet and Hannah bustled into the room carrying a tray with a china bowl and a stack of plates. She wore a uniform with a floral pattern faded by countless washes and her hair was covered with an off-white doek. When she'd served soup to the guests she waited, tray in hand, at her employer's shoulder.

"Get on with it," he said. Seated, he was taller than she was standing.

As Hannah placed the plate of soup on the table, Stefan chicken-winged his elbows upward. It was just enough to catch her on the forearm. A ring of soup formed between the plate and saucer.

"Ag, no," he said, now looking at her. "Again."

"Leave it, Papa," Anna said. "Hannah's doing her best." She spooned soup to her mouth.

Hannah took the dishcloth from her forearm and wiped the plate.

"What's wrong now?" Her father was just inches from her face. "Why do you look so dikbek?"

Anna dropped her spoon on her saucer. The clink reverberated about the room. Hannah used the ensuing silence to shuffle out.

"Some things they never learn," her father said. He waited until the footsteps faded down the passage.

"Ja-nee," said Koos. "Absolutely. And worse still, if we don't watch our backs these people will be running the show the day after tomorrow."

Stefan folded his arms.

"Toemaar," the Dominee said. He had one of those fatherly faces that one could never imagine being immature. His hair was white and streaked sideways over his scalp in an attempt to hide his baldness. "That's a long way off. Tell me, what do you think of that upstart Hofmeyr's motion to extend the coloured franchise?"

"He's as red as a lobster is what I say. And mad."

"That may be so," said Koos. "But he's not stupid. Dangerous, yes. We let him carry on poisoning our young minds and who knows..."

"That'll never happen while Daniel's in Parliament," said the Dominee. He broke his bread roll on his side plate and took a bite. "He's got the measure of slim Jannie and his boys." As he chewed, crumbs fell in a trail down his jacket. "Trust me," He glanced at his wife diagonally opposite him. She had the face of a woman who might once have been considered pretty before the spread of marriage and childbirth. She affirmed him with a smile. "I know," he continued. "I was at kweekskool with him." He looked at Koos. "I tell you, the man's got backbone. Never touched a drop of liquor. But clever as a fox."

"I've no doubt that his heart's in the right place," Koos said. He wiped a scum of soup from his moustache and then folded the serviette in his hand. "But he's too much talk. We need a man of action." He swept the room, paused, then said. "Like van Rensburg. He's our man."

"That's right, Pa," his son, Fanus, said, rolling his 'r' to sound like a gurgle. He was on Anna's left, furthest from her father and opposite Thomas. His face was soft, even for a part time farmer. He brushed a crumb from his tie and fell silent.

The host picked up the bottle of KWV and topped Hester's glass. Only when he'd replaced the bottle did he remember the Dominee's wife on his left. "Ag, sorry," he said. "May I pour?" He turned to Koos. "So what makes you think van Rensburg's our saviour?"

"Simple. Since he took over as leader, the Brandwag's membership has grown to over 300,000. Or 400,000 if you read *The Cape Times*. Which of course I don't."

"He's got charisma," her father said. "I'll give you that. But can we trust him? You know whose side he took in the rebellion?"

"Come on. Maritz and his boys never stood a chance against the might of the state. You can't hold it against van Rensburg. His job was on the line. He was young, anyway."

"Yes, but our Prime Minister?"

"President," Koos said. "We're going to be a Republic, remember."

"What?" Anna said. She folded her serviette and placed it on her placemat. "Britain would never allow that."

Her father gave her a look which not long ago would have dispatched her to her bedroom.

"Anna's right, Oom," said Fanus. His hair was straight and parted in the middle and a curtain fell just short of his left eye. "They'll never give us our freedom." The other diners looked at him. He paused for effect, then said, "But who says we'll need them to?"

The clock chimed nine from the voorkamer. It was that extended lull between starters and main course when guests start wondering whether the host has forgotten the food.

"Would you care to explain?" said Anna.

Fanus looked about the room. He had the self-assurance one could expect of a man about to graduate with a degree in Law but who would never have to practise for a living. His eyes rested on Thomas. "Germany will sort her out."

"Really?" Anna said. "They've stalled at Stalingrad. The whole winter campaign's a disaster. Don't you listen to the news?"

"Course I do." Fanus's neck turned pink. It also had several red marks from shaving. "Which is why I know that Leningrad and Moscow are set to fall. The panzers can see the spires of the Kremlin. They're just waiting for the thaw."

"That's rubbish," she said. "What news do you listen to?"

The room fell silent. The croaking of frogs drifted in through the open window.

"Ah," she continued. "Zeesen. I should have known. If you believe that propaganda, you'll believe..."

"Engel," her father interrupted, glaring. "This isn't the time."

She held her father's stare. The simmer of a lifetime's humiliation was coming to the boil. She was about to say something but then thought better of it.

Thomas leaned forward over the table, his back straight from his hips. He said, "What I think Anna means to say is that it's important to consider the source of one's information before drawing conclusions."

"But that's not what she said." A shaving splotch on Fanus' Adam's apple looked like it might be about to bleed.

"Leave it," Koos said. "That's what happens when we talk politics or religion. Let's change the subject." He swirled his wine about in the glass and held it up to the light to admire its legs. "Tell me, how's your flock?"

"We carry on," her father said. "You know the story. The bugs are rampant. Blue tongue's hit us particularly hard this year. And then those bleaters balk at taking the dip. Tomorrow we do our first batch of ewes. You?"

"Same," Koos said. "Except we also got maggots. Had to shave half the herd. Talk about a waste."

Anna watched her father catch Thomas' attention. They nodded in what seemed to be some unspoken agreement. He said to Koos, "Pity you didn't meet my colleague here earlier. His equipment would save a clipper two hours a day. At least."

"That so?" said Koos. "I'd be interested all right. With half our labourers driving ambulances up North, making the others more efficient wouldn't be a bad thing."

"No," her father said. "Half? You should have told me you were battling."

"How so?"

"There's a retired general on the Wool Board with me. I've heard nothing's changed on his farm. I'm sure he can help a friend."

"Ge," Koos said. He shovelled a piece of goose into his mouth and chewed as if he'd been given a deadline. "That's outrageous."

"Listen now," her father said, sweeping the table with his eyes. "We can carry on talking business after dinner." He turned to his right. "So. Hester. You joining any of those sewing tea parties for the Red Cross?"

"Jinne!" Hester blushed. "You think I'm one of those? A King's Afrikaner?" She glanced at her husband and back at Stefan. "You must be joking."

At that moment Hannah arrived with a roasted Spur Wing goose on a tray. Anna's father had bagged fifteen in a single shoot at Voëlvlei the previous weekend.

"Can I help carve, Oom?" Fanus piped.

"That will be kind," her father said. He waved at Hannah. "Get the carving knife for him."

Fanus set about his task of dismantling the goose with the fervour of a zealot. The conversation at the table had dried up and the guests seemed content to watch as he severed the wings and legs from the carcass.

"You won't believe what I saw today," Anna said loud enough for the table to hear.

"No," the Dominee said, "Tell us."

Her father rolled his eyes till his whites were larger than his pupils. Then he blinked them to normal. Thomas shifted in his chair.

"Footprints on Skulpiestrand," she said.

"That's a small beach on our land," her father explained. "Julia used to go there to collect shells, especially in her last years. None of us have been back since. He glared at Anna. "Not until today."

"There were at least a dozen." Anna got up from the table and joined Fanus at the server. She started dishing meat to the guests. She said, "It was like people were playing soccer or something. There was even the outline of a field."

"As you can see," her father said, looking at Koos. "My daughter's got a fertile imagination. But I suppose you need that to study Fine Art."

Anna let the fork she was holding clang to the serving dish. She'd never cried in public before and didn't intend to now. Her eyes fixed on her father's. "I can't wait till you leave for Parliament." A glance at Thomas. "Then I'll have all day to explore the coast that was always off limits." She scrunched the serviette. "Now that we've established that they're untouched by humankind, we can be sure I'll be perfectly safe."

Chapter 5

When Anna first became aware of the whispers drifting into her bedroom from outside she wasn't sure whether she was awake or dreaming. For all she knew it could have been the ruffle of the bougainvillea's Chinese lanterns against the windowsill. Or Nightjars. As she'd fought sleep, the events and conversations of the past forty-eight hours had replayed themselves in endless permutations. Flashes from out at sea, strange men, the unexplained footprints. An abundance of questions, but a drought of answers.

She lay still and waited. The air in her room was close and heavy and the sheet draped over her was moist and clung to her skin. Then she heard a clunk. It could have been the shutting of a door or a box being dropped. Her door was open and she could hear the embers sigh from the sitting room kaggel. Down the passage came the rasp of her father's snoring. Nothing else.

Then there was another sound, this one definitely from outside. A snort and flapping. She could only think it was the mule. She was fully awake now. She could not go back to sleep until she found out what was going on. She dressed, slipped on walking shoes, and set off down the passage.

The moon was a sliver from full and at its zenith and drenched the werf in phosphorescence. She padded across the gravel toward the outbuildings. The windows of the first guest cottage were open and she could hear someone snoring. Was it Fanus or his father? She continued past the second cottage. No sound. She paused. The windows and door were shut. How did Thomas breathe without fresh air? Was he dreaming, even now?

When she got to the shadow of the wild fig tree she stopped. A whoosh passed her face as close as touching. The Eagle Owl again. Her mother's spirit was with her. She turned an ear in the direction of the outbuildings, stopping the other with her finger to shut out the grumble of the sea. The whispers she'd heard earlier, coming from the far side of the shed. Then nothing. She crept up to the entrance. As far as she knew her father still used the space to store old machinery and spare parts—ploughs, threshers, tractors but it had been years since she'd been inside. She imagined it blanketed by cobwebs and dust.

She squeezed through a crack in the sliding door. The first thing that hit her was the smell of flesh, and blood. But not like the butchery in Bredasdorp. Or the food section of the general dealer. This was raw and fresh and animal. As her eyes adjusted to the dark she could make out the carcasses: a dozen at least, hanging from an improvised row of hooks on a roof beam. She ran her hand over the closest. It was smooth and moist: no doubting, a sheep. But why so many? When they'd needed meat in the past, her father would get the workers to slaughter one, maybe two.

The far side of the shed was stacked wall-to-wall and head height with crates. She stood on tiptoes to feel inside. One stack was of onions, the other cabbage. The only vegetables Rietvlei's soil could sustain. Her foot caught on something, causing her to stumble. It was a sack. She ran her hand over the hessian and then pressed her face to it. Grain: the smell of home.

Voices again, this time less muffled. She got up and followed them to the window. It was half open. She waited. A snort and stamp of feet. Then a flick of reins, followed by a chain jangling. She stepped closer to the window. Silence. She pulled back a fraction. When the voices started up again she edged forward and stood, allowing her eyes to adjust to the moonlit werf. A shape formed, of a mule hitched to a loaded cart. Seated at the front was the hunched outline of two men.

“Skulpiestrand tonight, is it?” The voice was unfamiliar, speaking pidgin Afrikaans with none of the folk’s cadence.

Anna’s mind charged ahead of her heartbeat. Skulpiestrand? Perhaps the scuffmarks she’d seen were not a delusion after all. There was only one way to be sure. But return so soon to the same, forbidden strip of coastline? And at night? Just twelve months before she wouldn’t have dreamt of it. But that was then.

She waited until the cart was far enough along the road not to notice her before she ventured from the shadows. In the light of the moon she could make out the tire treads of the bakkie snake into the thicket of Port Jacksons. At first she had to slow her pace to stop from catching up with the clip clop of the cart. But by the time the outline of the homestead roof had dipped below the scrub behind her she was alone but for a choir of crickets.

When she got to the gate she was surprised to see that the chain hanging loose and the padlock open. Didn’t Papa say only he had a key? She hesitated at the threshold. If he found her out, he’d explode. There was a time she would have trembled at the thought. Now she felt more revulsion than fear.

As she squeezed through the gap between the gate and fence pole her dress caught on a barb of wire. She stopped, panting. A Platanna croaked from a rush of thatch. She felt at her hem. A piece of cloth hung below a tear. Her father didn’t miss a thing: she’d have to sew it first thing tomorrow before putting it in the washing. She checked that the gate was closed behind her and stood, dusting her dress. There was no turning back now.

Anna kept to the middelmannetjie of solid ground between the tracks, not daring to look down for the possibility of night adders. The air was cool and clear but the moon was so bright it had drowned the Milky Way. The only two stars were the pointers to the Southern Cross. She held her hand up, measured off the distance between the pointers and counted two and a half lengths down the spine of the cross to an imaginary point in the sky. Then she dropped vertically from there until her fingernail hit the rise of the Sandberg, which was as low as a sand dune, just longer and covered in bush. Behind it, she knew, was the Agulhas lighthouse and then an endless sea.

A kink in the road broke Anna’s reverie. Though still between the tracks, she was now walking through patches of Renosterbos and a bed of Vygies. The noise of the ocean was close and insistent. She shivered. A memory of scuff marks. And a swinging door.

As she rounded another bend the tongue of a breeze licked her face and she smelt salt and kelp. There was a snort ahead. She stopped, waited, then shuffled forward. Ahead she could make out the mule cart, standing askance and blocking the road. There was no sign of the men.

She took a few steps off the side of the slipway and dropped to her hands and knees. The two men were speaking freely now. Even over the sound of the sea, there was no mistaking the drawl of Strandveld Afrikaans. She crept forward until she crested the last rise before the sea. The path of the slipway toward the water was highlighted by the phosphorescence of lichen on the rock. Just before it disappeared into the water it passed the outline of a cottage. She froze. It was the one she’d seen the day before.

The voices were getting closer. Anna crawled behind a bush and pressed down into the kelp. The men sauntered past, close enough for her to see their faces. She felt her neck muscles stiffen. One of them was Kleinjan.

When they got to the cart, the other man hopped on the back. "Right," he said, flinging a tarpaulin cover to the ground. "We'd better be quick."

The two men took turns lowering the crates and sacks from the cart and hauling them down the slipway to the cottage. By the time they'd finished the Southern Cross had dipped below the Sandberg. Dawn wouldn't be long now. Papa would be up shortly before that. What if she got back after him?

Kleinjan returned to the cart alone and made to feel beneath his seat. The ting of copper as he lifted an object. His hand feeling again. Then the slosh from a gallon drum and the shake of matches. He was off the cart in a flash. Instead of joining the other man at the cottage, he turned off the slipway and picked his way up and across a seam of rock that jugged out to sea. When he got to the point he stopped. A scraping. Then a flicker. And a stronger light. Kleinjan was standing now, lantern in one hand. With his free hand he fiddled at a fitting on its side. One flash. Then another.

At first Anna didn't know what was bothering her. An odd familiarity. On. Off. On. Off. Then the lantern died. She looked out over the sea where waves advanced in haunted whites. Closer to shore there was a passage of calm. It was the mouth of a cove.

Anna wiggled her toes for feeling. It had been three minutes since Kleinjan had last moved. The other man was still inside the cottage. She thought again of leaving. If she jogged she should be back before Papa woke.

She was on one knee when she saw the first flash. In the ink stain of the ocean beyond the breakers. On. Off. On. Off. A familiar sequence. She tried to memorise them. No need. She'd seen them before. Two nights ago from the truck.

Kleinjan picked up the lantern and made his way off the ledge. His colleague joined him and they scurried back to the cart. There was a scrunch of bush as the cart wheeled about off the narrow track. The mule stamped its feet, shook its head. Kleinjan goaded it and they were off at a trot.

Anna bent to rub her leg awake. The safe thing would be to run after the cart. Or was it? What if her timing was off and Papa was awake. It would be better to wait until he set off on the lands. She found a seat of sand at the high-water mark above the slipway and sat. There was a clear view through the mouth of the cove to where she'd seen the flashes.

She shook her head. Again. Her eyes were wide now, every sense on standby. But there was nothing but the relentless roar of the ocean and a lapping of waves against the shells. Had she fallen asleep? The moon was nowhere and the sky a hint of blue.

Then a splash came from the direction of the ocean. At first she couldn't see anything through the splotches of mist that hung over the cove. A staccato voice strained by the rhythm of the waves. Another splash and a clunk of oars. A boat scraped onto the beach and four men jumped into the shallows. Those that remained on the boat took turns to pass crates to the men in the water.

Anna crept backward over the vygies. She felt like running. Instead, when she reached the first clump of Renosterbos she stopped and lay flat.

The men bustled back and forth between the cottage and the boat. They were hauling crates, then sacks. There was no talking as they distributed the load through the fore and after of the boat. They were finished within minutes. Then they lined up two on each side of the boat and shoved.

“Scheiße.” Anna wouldn’t believe it at first. A trick of nature, or sleepless night? An oar clanked on the boat and one of the man kicked at water. “Stussen.” The men crouched then heaved and the boat grated through the shells until it was afloat. Then it was as though the ocean paused to breathe. She could hear the men clearly now. Scared now, she started crawling backwards. There was no way she was going to get caught alone with a boatload of strange men. She had to get home before the light. As she picked her way through the bush toward the mountain the certainty of what she’d tried to ignore, dawned. The men were German.

Chapter 6

Standing alongside Thomas, Anna watched Kleinjan tug at the shifting spanner. He'd been awkward in her presence all day, avoiding eye contact, keeping conversation to a minimum. She was beginning to wonder if he knew she'd seen him the night before. But how could that be? By the time she returned to the werf the first blue of dawn was glowing in the east and there had been no sign of life. Regardless, she would have to confront him. She wasn't sure she could wait until they drove back to Cape Town. She simply had to learn the truth.

Kleinjan looked up the side of the triangular windmill tower. The turbine was spinning in a blur. Apparently satisfied, he slid his free hand up the piston that connected the driveshaft to the pump below. It was sucking up and down. He followed a hose from the base of the structure to the rim of the reservoir where it connected with the asbestos inlet. There was a dribble onto the moss-flaked floor. "It's been a dry summer," he said, raising his head to look at them.

"Cape Town too," Anna said, leaning back against the bonnet of the bakkie. Her legs were crossed at her knees and she held her dress down with both hands to prevent it from billowing. "The reservoirs on Table Mountain are almost empty."

"This doesn't make sense," said Kleinjan, contorting his head in the direction of the windmill. "Everything seems to be working as it should." He stared at the inlet. "Yet there's nothing. I've got to do something soon. If any of the flock dies, Baas Stefan..."

Thomas stood up off the bonnet. "Here." He held out his hand for the spanner. "Give me that." Kleinjan obliged. Thomas tightened the head of the spanner over a nut on the piston. Then he jammed his heel against the side of the concrete plinth at the base of the tower to steady himself and yanked. Just a creak. His triceps were long and taut. He yanked again. This time a grating of rust on metal. Then a muffled cannon shot from the bowels of the earth. And a gurgle. Soon water gushed in spurts from the outlet pipe.

"Jô," Kleinjan wiped his brow on the sleeve of his overall. "How did you know what to do?"

"Beginner's luck." Thomas handed the spanner to Kleinjan and ambled back to the bakkie.

"Not bad for an equipment smous," Anna said. "I'm impressed."

"It's nothing." Thomas wiped his hand across his thigh. It left a smudge of grease on his khaki trousers. "I trained as an engineer. Mechanical. Why do you think your father asked me to come with you to the windmill?"

"And you're in sales now? That's an odd progression."

"Actually not." Thomas centred his buckle and tucked the end of his belt back in the trouser loop. Without looking up, he said, "An engineering degree is a prerequisite for a job in technical sales and support. Where I come from, anyway."

"And where's that?" Anna ran a finger through a stray strand of hair and swept it from her face. She bent down and cocked her head to one side in order to catch his eyes.

He straightened as if from a stiff back and squinted at the sun. "Enough of me," he said, making eye contact. "I want to hear about you."

Anna held his eyes. They were as clear and blue as the lagoon at Pietie-se-Punt on a windless day. She swallowed.

"Something wrong?" he said.

Kleinjan had wandered around to the far side of the reservoir and was reaching over the rim to clear a nest floating on the rising surface of water.

Anna couldn't bring herself to look away. "Nothing. Well. It's just that no man has ever asked me that before. You know. How I am."

Thomas closed a step between them. "Judging from the cast of characters at the dinner party last night, I'm not surprised."

Anna dropped her eyes to his chest. "Fanus can come across as bumptious, obnoxious even – but he's not all bad. You must understand: it's hard with a father like that. The Prinsloos are like royalty in these parts. Imagine the weight of expectation."

"Why don't you go along with it then?"

Anna laughed. She wondered if she was blushing. "What do you mean?"

"I know your father well enough to know he's as ambitious for his daughter as he is in politics or business."

"It's that obvious, is it?"

"Young Fanus is a lucky man," Thomas said. "And I'm not talking about the family fortune."

Anna got up off the bonnet and straightened her dress. She looked across the reservoir. "Hey," she called. Kleinjan was scraping animal droppings off the water. "You can finish that tomorrow."

"What now?" said Thomas. "I can't seem to say anything right."

Anna sighed. "It's not you."

"What is it then?"

"I'm just irritable. Happens when I'm tired."

"Oh?"

"A little trouble sleeping, that's all. It was one of those hot and sticky nights. We only get a handful of them a year. Did the mosquitoes bother you?"

"It was that argument with your father last night, wasn't it? He said. "You've been brooding ever since."

"I'm a woman," she said. "Sometimes we're just otherwise...Do you have a wife, Thomas?"

"Fiancée."

She tried not to sound disappointed. "You don't sound enthusiastic."

"You're not the only one with an overbearing parent." Thomas gazed into the distance. It was the time of day when the sky merged with the horizon and the lands were a watercolour of browns and greys. Next to him a Sugarbird bobbed up from the shrivelled head of a Pincushion Protea and chirped into the wind.

Anna withdrew her hands from the bonnet as if for the first time realising it was hot. "Come," she called to Kleinjan. "Pack your tools. I still need to find some flowers on the way to the sheep dip." She stood. "Papa's expecting us there at four."

Thomas marched back in the direction of the reservoir. The toolbox stood three yards from Kleinjan, lid open. "Here," he said, reaching for the handle. "Let me help."

"Scheiße" Thomas flung his arms back. "Was ist das?"

Kleinjan grabbed Thomas's wrist and yanked him backwards. Then he took a step across his path, stopped and stared at the ground in front of the toolbox. His free hand shot into the air. "Wait."

For a moment no one spoke against the *ee aw* of the windmill's piston.

"Toemaar," Kleinjan said at last. "It's just a Puff Adder." Then he edged a semi-circle about a speckled black and green 'S' that was barely distinguishable from the ground below it. He carefully retrieved his tool box and backed away. "He won't bother with us if we leave him alone. Lazy devil."

The wheels spun, sending a fantail of sand behind the bakkie. When they gained traction the car surged forward then stopped. Kleinjan threw the gear lever into reverse and out and they yawed a three point turn before pulling off. When they'd reached a constant speed, Anna said, "A bit of an over-reaction, no?"

"What do you mean?" Thomas' back was turned at forty five degrees to her.

"Back there," she said. "Don't you get puff adders in South West?"

Thomas kept his shoulder blade turned toward her. An ostrich pranced across the road and melted into the bush. "Sure," he said at last. "So many I developed a childhood phobia. I'm not scared of much. But snakes..."

"Just teasing," she manufactured a laugh. The string of thoughts connecting in her mind were leading to a conclusion too outlandish to accept, at least not yet. "You're not the only man I know who has a thing about them. Look." An antelope with knock-knees stood at the side of the road. When it saw the car it startled this way and that, then ducked for the cover of a shrub. "You get Duiker, I take it?"

The engine ticked and revved over a series of potholes. "Sure," he said "Especially in the Caprivi, where it's not so dry..." He pointed out the other window. "Hey, weren't you looking for flowers? If I'm not mistaken those are King Proteas?"

"Yes. Lovely. I'm impressed. You know your fynbos better than your snakes."

He smiled. "I may just be a smous. But there are advantages of being on the road. I get time to read up on all sorts of stuff. For example." He paused as if considering his next words. Did you know Hitler made a speech once: said that one day he'd be picking proteas in Cape Agulhas?"

"He says lots of stupid things. The man's deluded."

"That's what he likes his enemies to think," Thomas said. "With apparent success."

"Enough," Anna shivered. "Hey, Kleinjan. Stop. Over there."

They climbed from the cab. The South Easter was in full fury about their ears and a tyre tread of cloud streaked the sky.

"How do these look?" Anna held a clutch of protea cones wrapped in a snow field of Everlastings. Without waiting for an answer she skipped to the next bush. "Here. Even better." Her cheeks were flamingo pink. The world beyond might have been in flames, she felt, but here, in this her place, it was well with her soul. "Aren't they beautiful?"

She watched Thomas bend over the clutch and plunge his face into a flower. When he lifted his face he was staring into her eyes. Something stirred in her. No man had ever made her feel such heights of guilt and pleasure without touching. Only when a gust swept a lock of hair over her face did she turn. Kleinjan was nowhere. She swept the hair behind an ear and looked back at him. "So, who are you?"

Thomas reached down for another protea and ran his fingers down the wax of its stem until it reached the branch. He looked up at her as though he were weighing something in the balance. Then he broke the stem and said, "That's a question I often ask myself."

"That's not what I mean."

He held the cup of the flower to his nose and inhaled. "So you want to get personal," he said. "Also. All right. But first: tell me about last night."

Anna did what she always did when her sixth sense started flashing red. Nothing.

"I see..."

His tone made her feel like a cloud had crossed the sun.

"It's in order to question my credentials but as soon as I ask an innocent question, you're speechless."

She opened her hands. The wind lifted everlasting snow drops and carried them off. The proteas fell to the ground. "We should be going." She glanced at the *bakkie*. There was no sign of Kleinjan. So much for a chaperone.

Thomas clasped her wrist. She struggled to free it. The grip fastened. His eyes were the colour of the sky reflected off the distant salt pan. He said, "Not before you answer me."

"Jong, leave me alone. If Papa hears you've laid a hand on me, he'll..."

"If you and your Papa were so precious, why didn't you tell him what you saw at the cove?"

Scenes flickered across Anna's mind. The guest room door: it had been ajar. The first tendril of fear tickled her back. No. Stop. She'd learned from her father that attack is the best means of defence. She said, "Is that how a gentleman repays his host for his hospitality: spies on their daughter. Sies, man."

"Spying?" He smiled with half his face. "A deaf man on a galloping horse would have heard you thumping about the yard."

Anna glanced at the *bakkie* again. Kleinjan was out back, rummaging in his toolbox. "Still, you followed me."

Thomas withdrew his hand. "Only because I was worried about you," he said. "A young women out on the lands with two workers up to no good. Any man worth his salt would have done the same."

The wind scoured her ears and she had to strain to hear his words before they were swept over the veld. She watched a fish eagle soar over the outline of the Akkedisberg. More than anything, she wanted to believe him. "Did you tell Papa?"

"What you get up to at night is none of my business. But strange men taking fresh supplies to men in row boats. I had to ask."

Anna considered his response. Would a man so openly discuss a crime if he'd been party to it? "What did he say?"

"At first he claimed ignorance. Until I pointed out it was his workers, using his store room on his werf."

She tracked the eagle's spiral. More information, all accurate. "And?"

"I'm sorry. He swore me to silence."

"I'm his daughter, for heaven's sake. Besides, I saw it myself."

"Don't make me betray confidence," he said. "Stefan's more than a customer. He's been good to me."

"Ag, please." Anna stooped to inspect a Protea Compacta. Its petals, like a protective circle of flames, curled inward about the stamen. When she straightened she said, "There were lights at sea, men speaking German. We're at war, for heaven's sake."

"I think you're getting ahead of yourself," Thomas said. "It's not like there aren't German speakers in these parts. I meet one every other day. And the lights: there could be any number of explanations."

"Listen," Anna felt a chill rise up her neck. "I've had all night to think this through. Her eyes narrowed at the shimmer of the salt pan. "Workers from our farm have been supplying a German vessel. Probably a raider. There was one caused havoc in our waters in '40 and '41. Laid a minefield here off Agulhas. I saw with my own eyes a mine washed up on the beach. Good heavens, that means..." The wind lifted her skirt. She made no effort to straighten it. She was searching his eyes but coming up empty. She said, "My father's a traitor."

"Even if you're right about the boats," Thomas said. "I'm sure Stefan doesn't see it that way. Think about it. The Kaiser welcomed his parents in their hour of need. He told me the whole story the other night. No-one else would have anything to do with renegade Boers. How could he think of them as the enemy?"

"How could he not?" Anna placed her hands on her hips. "When he knows what they're doing to the people whose countries their panzers crush. Hemel. My father's a Member of Parliament. He of all people should know what's happening on the Eastern Front – not to mention with the Jews."

"Calm down." Thomas waved a hand palm down. "I'm not the one who needs convincing." A flash of recognition. His eyebrows slowly rising. "O dear," he said. "That's it." His mouth in a grimace, chevrons deep. "You think...because I speak German...I'm somehow...involved?"

In an instant, Anna felt ashamed. Had events of the past two days been playing with her mind? There really were no solid grounds on which to doubt him. "No, no," she said. "I'm sorry if it came out like that. But surely you could forgive me for thinking it a bit of a coincidence: you know, you and Kurt pitching up here the same time as all this is happening on the farm." She glanced at the bakkie. "Anyway. Come. We're supposed to be picking flowers." As they meandered she pointed out species

of fynbos, first by their Latin names and then their common ones. Thomas repeated them after her. When they moved behind a large thicket of bush, he stopped. "I know this isn't my business," he said. It was quiet in the shelter of the wind. "But your father..." He looked up. "This is hard." He waited for a cloud to scud overhead. "I have a lot of respect for him. Affection even. But I have to say this: he doesn't treat you properly."

She recoiled. "What do you mean?"

"You're frightened of him. That's not normal. Girls aren't supposed to be scared of their fathers."

Anna dropped the proteas at her feet. "Papa loves me," she said. "He has a strange way of showing it but he loves me."

Thomas stooped to pick up the flowers. He held the bunch to her and said, "Why do you put up with it? I can see it hurts."

"Why do you care?"

"I don't know."

Their eyes danced a tango.

She let him take her hand, this time allowing it to linger. She could see now that he'd trimmed his beard and his skin was paler than she'd first thought. She said, "This isn't right."

"What do you mean?" he said. "You're here; I'm here; we're surrounded by God's beauty. What could be wrong with that?"

"Everything. Magtig. We've only just met."

"How long do you have to know someone to be sure that you love them?" His lips were inches away. She felt a chill cross her chest. Her shoulders were back and her breasts felt hard against the cotton of her dress. She placed a finger on his lips. "Wait," she said. "You still haven't answered my question." She withdrew her finger. "Who are you really?"

This time Thomas drew back. For a moment it looked like he was going to say something. Then a door slammed in his mind. He stooped to pick a Porcupine quill off the ground and caressed it between his thumb and the tip of his index finger. "I wish it didn't have to come to this."

"What is it?" She took a step backward. A tinder branch cracked. "You look so serious."

He closed the gap between them. The quill twirled between his fingers.

Anna cast her eyes left and right. The bakkie was streaked behind protea branches. Still no sign of Kleinjan. What was she thinking, going out on the lands with a strange man? Lust. Dominee de Wet was right. It was the first course of the devil's feast.

"Ah, there you are." Her father boomed over the bush before his face appeared. It had been years since she'd felt so pleased to hear his voice. "You skelms. What the hell's been keeping you? We've already lost an hour."

"Papa." Anna hoped the sunlight would hide her blush. "We just stopped for flowers. Look: aren't the King Proteas gorgeous? We just had to—"

"I'm going to give that bugger a snotklap." Stefan swirled his head ninety degrees toward the bakkie. "He knows damn well we were supposed to start at four."

Thomas stepped between them. "Slow down," he said. "Your daughter has been teaching me about fynbos." He cradled a flower, grinned. "Protea Compacta." Using the nail of his other hand's thumb he nudged a bee from its stamen. Then he bent down and inspected a smaller, thinner plant. When he looked up he was grinning. "Leucospermum..." he glanced at Anna, who mouthed something.

"Ge," her father said. "You're sounding like one of those UCT Botany professors Julia used to invite to the farm to do research. Spent weeks here, never bothered to shave properly. I don't know what they did all day. And all we ever saw for our troubles was a tattered copy of a PhD thesis." He trod his size thirteen veldskoen on the neck of a protea bush until it snapped. "You'd think they could at least have included a commercial viability study. I had to hear it from Dries Roux. How the neighbours are starting to export to Europe. No, man." He stomped over another bush. "Come. The Prinsloos are waiting. We've still got five hundred sheep to dunk before dark."

Chapter 7

Though Anna had witnessed a sheep dip a hundred times she struggled not to gag at the reek of poison as she approached the plunge pool. They were under the partial shade of a grove of blue gum trees and pieces of shrivelled bark and twigs sprinkled the ground. The structure surrounding the dip tank was positioned in the corner of a paddock to make it easier to herd the sheep into the entrance chute. Two black and white Border Collies harassed back and forth, snapping at the bewildered animals' ankles. A shepherd boy stood by, ready to crack his rawhide whip.

"Afternoon, Anna." It was Dries Roux, tenant farmer and sometime friend of her father. He stood alone on the far side of the chute with his fists on his hips. Koos and Fanus Prinsloo paced a patch of Vlei Grass a dozen yards away, tight in conversation. Dries raised two fingers to doff the edge of his wide-brimmed hat. It was level with his eyebrows, making his nose seem bigger than it was. His check shirt was faded and its sleeves were rolled three inches past his elbows.

"Sorry we're late," she said. "You know how I lose track of time when I'm on the lands. You should have started without us."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Fanus said, closing the gap between them at his father's prodding. Without asking he took her hand. His palm felt cold and damp and the back of his hand hairless. "You're the main attraction."

There was a time, albeit brief, when Anna had been charmed by his flattery. Now it made her feel dirty. She said, "Ag, man."

Fanus flicked his head in the direction of the bakkie where Thomas stood with his forearm draped over the open passenger door. For a moment, neither man flinched. Then Fanus turned toward his father, who now stood at the edge of the plunge pool. "Come, this side," he said to Anna and tugged at her hand. "We'll get a better view." He pointed at a ewe which wavered at the edge of the platform. It bleated, then wiggled its stump. "Don't you just love their eyes when they see water?"

Anna's father walked past, tailed by a worker who was lugging a ten gallon drum of poison. He took it from the handlanger and handed it to Dries. "Here," he said. "Plenty more in the Chevy." He looked up at the others. "Come, men. Let's do it."

Anna pulled her hand free and wiped it on the cotton of her thigh. She looked up at a cloud which halved and then dissolved.

"What is it with you?" Fanus leaned towards her. Even in the wind she could smell his aftershave. "Why such a cold fish?"

"What do you mean?" She swirled around.

"We used to get on so well." With his chest puffed and feet splayed Fanus looked like a jilted penguin. "Remember last Easter? Man, it was less than a year ago."

"Ag, please," she said. "You make it sound like we were gekys."

"Weren't we?" He'd deflated somewhat. "All right: I admit: it wasn't official. But remember that night after Nagmaal. We—"

"Stop." Anna rolled back her shoulders and adjusted her bra strap. "I'm a university student now. Don't you realise I've changed."

"That's normal," he said. "I also went through a rebellious patch in my first year. Just ask Pa." He turned to his father. The older man was out of earshot, watching a worker in overalls prod a ewe up the gangplank to join a half dozen of its fellows on the raised platform. "You'll come around, sooner or later."

"Hurry up," Stefan shouted at the worker. "Dunk her." He looked at Koos then at Dries. "Do something, man. If we bugger around like this we'll never get done by tomorrow. I only got a week's grace from Parliament, you know."

Anna started. It wasn't her father's brusqueness. She was used to that. It was the worker. The man was darker than the volk. From the Transkei, she guessed. They'd made an appearance before: migrant workers: mostly they didn't stay, couldn't - at least not without carrying a pass. And the local magistrates would see to it that it was temporary at best. There was a familiarity about his stance, something immediate, a menace even. It wasn't the face that bothered her: handsome, with high, rounded cheek bones, and a jawline disfigured by a scar. Rather, it was the expression. Even from a distance, his contempt was obvious.

"What are you looking at, jong?" Stefan said. "Get on with it."

The worker kept staring.

"Hey, Dries. Where did you get this uppity piece of work? Get him back to work."

Dries strode up to the worker. When he got close he bent down, picked up a dry branch. "Listen here." He drew the stick back and feigned a blow. "Don't make me." Then he lanced the stick through the paling at the hind leg of the nearest ewe. It splayed its legs and scrambled to retreat. Dries shoved. The animal slid on its hooves across the platform and teetered at the edge, lost balance and plunged into the water. On cue, the worker leaned over and held the animal's body under the water. Every now and again he relaxed his grip to allow it to surface.

"Enough," called Dries. "Next."

When the third sheep had been through its paces, Anna strolled back to the bakkie.

"Had enough already?" Thomas said.

"And you? You don't seem very interested considering you make a living in the agricultural industry." She glanced around. The others were focussed on the bleating and splashing of sheep. "Listen," she said. "I may be young. Naïve even - by your standards, no doubt I am. But I'm not a fool."

He rubbed his chin. The beard was gone.

"I admit," she said. "You had me. Even an hour ago, you managed to convince me I was imagining things. But the mind works in mysterious ways. They say one thinks more in the sub-conscious than the conscious. But I'm sure you know Freud better than I do. Being one of your countrymen."

"What are you talking about?" Thomas took a step closer.

Anna stiffened. "You tried that earlier," she said. "Intimidating me." She looked behind her at the men clumped around the dip. "Things are different now."

"Don't say something you're going to regret..."

"Regret?" She raised her voice to the wind. "You, tell me, about regret?"

"Anna. Stop. You don't know what you're getting yourself into." He closed the gap between them, took her hand. She didn't resist. "You've got to trust me."

"I might begin to trust you when you start telling me the truth." Her eyes rested on his hand. It felt strangely natural in hers. Like an extension of her body.

"I wish it was as simple as that," he said. "Truth. Falsehood. Good people and bad."

"There you go again: avoiding the question. If you carry on I'll be forced to..." she raised her hand to point. But the fight was leaving her. She was going through the motions. "Tell them."

He drew her closer and placed his other hand over the top of hers. There was a whiff of sweat on khaki. Satisfied he had her full attention now, he said, "I'll explain. I promise. It's just that... Now is not the time."

"Hemel," she said, looking up at the Blue Gums. Their branches were bunched, like hundreds of connected parachutes straining against the wind. "You can't expect me to wait."

"You're going to do as I say." He glanced at her father, who was stroking a sheep dog. "And I believe you know why."

"Oh, so now you're a mind reader. Don't think you know me just because in a weak moment I let you hold my hand. I have a conscience. I'm not going to sit around and watch my country be violated."

Thomas straightened as if with a stiff back. "Do you know what they do with traitors in wartime?"

"Yes. Same as they do with spies."

"I resent that insinuation. But I'll let it go. You are obviously stressed. Anyway, I'm not from these parts." He looked up. The remains of a cloud stretched, then vanished. "I could be gone tomorrow without a trace." He turned back to her. "That wouldn't be so easy for your father."

Anna made to ignore him. Instead she gazed in the direction of her father. He was ruffling the Collie behind its ears. The dog had an expression of delight and adoration. Loyalty, she pondered, it was the virtue he'd preached and fought for with bone and marrow. Devotion to family and fatherland was his motto. How could she, his own blood...?

"Just give me three days," he said. "Stefan wants me to drive with him tomorrow. Says you are to follow with Kleinjan on Sunday. We'll meet in Cape Town. I'll explain everything then."

She examined his face for answers. "Why not now?"

"You'll just have to trust me." He watched her father lobbed a stick across the veld. The dog bounded over the bushes to fetch it. "I know people that can make this all go away. You'll be safe. Your father. You."

The dog dropped the stick in front of her father and sat, panting in anticipation. Anna stooped to pick up a dry branch and traced a double circle in the sand with its fork. "I can't see how you can change any of this."

Her father was walking toward them now, head lowered and eyebrows like miniature horns.

"Let's meet in the Company's Garden," he said. "That's near Parliament. You'll be there, won't you?"

Anna tossed the branch into the veld and stared at it long after it had landed. She felt excited. Fought to reverse it. Goodness knows, she should be angry with him. Scared even. How did he know her university residence was just beyond the Gardens' top gate? What else did he know? For a moment she thought she was going to refuse. "All right," she found herself saying instead. "It's lovely. I walk there often."

"You do?" His eyes widened. "This is good then. Is there a convenient place to meet?"

Her father was closing in on them, ignoring the dog at his ankles. "Yes," she said. "A café. I'm afraid it's just a toasted sandwich dive. Run by an English immigrant who can't stop talking about his son being the first to volunteer." She kicked at a rock. On the third attempt it dislodged from the ground. A nest of ants spread in alarm. "Magtig. I don't know why I'm agreeing to this."

"I think you do."

Anna shovelled sand into the hole. Then she looked toward Fanus who was conferring with his father. No doubt a technicality on sheep hygiene or something equally banal. She wondered if he was as intense in his study of wine farming, or the quarry, as he was of sheep. "Even so," she said. "I just don't know if a secret can be kept that long in these parts."

"If you're worried about them," he said, pointing at the group. "Don't bother." He coughed. "They know more than I do."

Chapter 8

The first thing to come into view as Anna and Kleinjan approached the Moravian mission hamlet from the east was the church. Though bigger than the other buildings in town, the simple thatch-roofed structure was a far cry from the Dutch Reformed edifice that dominated the heights of Bredasdorp. It was set among a cluster of public-use buildings which included the mission store, the flower shed and the watermill. That was about the extent of what Anna knew about the place. Though she had often passed through with her father on her way to and from Bredasdorp, she'd never stopped other than to drop off or collect workers. He wouldn't sanction any fraternising with the locals, said they were a cult, inbred. Now she was hoping to find certainty, or solace at least, in their simplicity. Ahead, a stream of the townsfolk faithful were shuffling down Main Road toward the sanctuary. It was fifteen minutes to ten.

"There," she said. "Told you we'd make it. Jong, you worry too much." She watched Kleinjan take one hand off the steering wheel and align the purple sash to the diagonal of his suit jacket. It had the letters IOTT stitched into the fabric, ELIM CHAPTER. It wasn't often that he had the chance to wear the regalia of the International Order of the True Templars and he wore it with pride. Word was he had once been a firebrand, preaching the perils of liquor to anyone who would listen. But the passing of time must have mellowed him. It was an open secret he would accept a glass of Tassenberg with the other workers when no one else was looking.

"You're right." He grabbed the wheel with both hands to steady the bakkie from a blast of wind. "Worry is a sin. Matthew 6 verse 26. But ai, it's a struggle." He took his eyes off the road to look at the clock on the dashboard. "The predikant gets mad when a person is late."

"So you've told me. Five times since breakfast. Relax: I have no intention of keeping the Lord's anointed waiting."

"Hai. You mustn't joke like that. He's also the mayor, you know."

"Is that so? And let me guess, you're related."

Kleinjan let the bakkie roll to a standstill at the T-junction with Main Road. Opposite was a Coca-Cola sign, heralding the town's general dealer store, and alongside it an easy-to-miss monument to slavery. A hag staggered past the windscreen clinging to the arm of another, her prune face small behind a shroud of black. "We're simple folk," he said. "That's true. Not rich or important. But I wouldn't want it any other way. It keeps us on the narrow path."

"That so?" Anna turned her shoulder on him, and wound down her window. A husk of a weed was cartwheeling away from them along the gravel of Main Road. The cottages on either of the street were one or two-bedroomed, with thatched roofs and disproportionately small windows. Folk of all ages were appearing from doorways: men in dark suits clutching bibles, followed by women in head coverings. Even the children were subdued. The landscape stretching from the last dwelling of town to the Akkedisberg on the horizon was featureless except for the occasional cypress tree.

Kleinjan jerked at the handbrake. The squeak caused a swallow to flutter from its nest under the eave of a cottage across the road. "What's wrong, Miss Anna. Why are you being so sarcastic today? It's not like you."

Anna watched a whirlwind eddy across the road and peter out over the veld.

"Are you angry with me?" Kleinjan nodded recognition at a pair of elderly men clutching bibles as they passed by the window.

Anna looked past him to the clock. It was positioned above the gable of the church's annex. "Let's talk after the service," she said. "I wouldn't want you to be shunned by the community for being late."

"There. Again. You are cross with me."

Anna smiled, her anger melting. "You know me too well." She felt an urge to tell him everything. After all, he'd been an ear to her when her own father was too preoccupied to care, or worse. But an instinct stopped her. "I just find you change whenever you go back to Elim. Tell me, how long is it since you've been at Rietvlei? Twenty years? Twenty-one? And this community still has such a hold on you."

"You must understand. Even if a man strays from the fold - like me with Hannah - he never really leaves. Not even in death." Kleinjan opened the door. "Remember what I said earlier." He swung his legs out from under the steering wheel. "Women use the first entrance." He pointed at her hat on the back seat. "And don't forget that..."

A woman in an all-blue dress with a matching bow about her hat, paraded up to the car. Beaming, she doffed her hat.

"Morning, Joanna," Kleinjan said. "My jinne, you look smart today."

"Hai," she blushed a shade of her lipstick. "Still the charmer, hey." She looked him up and down. "Where've you been? It feels like years, old man."

"Ag, you know. There's always so much to do. Especially at Rietvlei. You know this year we..." He turned as if remembering something. "Miss Anna. Meet Joanna. My cousin."

Joanna offered her glove. "Good day, ma'am," she said to Anna. "Honoured to have you with us." Then she turned to Kleinjan. "Would you believe it? You're the second lot of visitors in two days."

"No," Kleinjan said. He looked irritated. "Who were the others?"

Joanna lowered her voice. "Also white people. One stayed in the car the whole time. A man. I didn't get to see his face. The other went with the missionary." Joanna pointed over the church's roof to the top of a row of trees. You know how he likes to while away time in die Heer-se-Bos. Yesterday he must have been there for at least half an hour."

They were interrupted by a clang of bells. Kleinjan looked up at the clock. It was five to ten and the stream of congregants had dried. "Excuse me," he said to Anna. "Men go around the back." He opened the door. "Joanna will show you the way."

The predikant stood sentinel in the pulpit with both his hands resting on the text of the bible open in front of him. He was dressed in black and the hem of his robe almost touched the platform. He gazed down at an elder who was sidling up to a lectern. The man seemed to relish the platform from which to address the congregation. His faded pinstripe suit hung uncomfortably, as though he'd inherited it from an overweight father. He opened a sheet of ruffled paper which he'd fished from his jacket pocket. "Herewith the results of Sunday the first of February," he read, then paused for effect. "First collection: two pounds, fifteen shillings, eleven pence...Second collection..." He looked up at the congregation, unable to suppress a grin. "Three pounds, four shillings, six pence."

The predikant's face had softened to foreshadow a smile. He waited for the elder to take his place in the pews. Then he stretched his arms in welcome, raised his head to the balcony, and nodded.

The organ droned the first stanza of *Oh God of Jacob* and the congregation stood. Anna craned her neck to glimpse the choir. When she looked down she realised almost everyone was watching her. Was it her turning, or because she was the only pale woman in a sea of brown? Before turning forward again she ventured a glance across the divide. Row upon row of men, sombre as stone. Kleinjan was standing beside a pillar. To his right was a man with the same high cheekbones, just slighter, and his face contorted with age. Could it be his father? It struck Anna how little she really knew about their foreman. They'd talked often of course, sometimes at length. But about things that mattered to her: plants, animals, art, politics, even girl problems. Now she wished she hadn't been so self-centred.

She became agitated when the organ launched into the refrain. She only had a half hour after the service to catch Kleinjan in his home environment. He'd be at his most vulnerable then: before he clammed up and they continued their journey to Cape Town. She'd need all her powers of finesse.

The predikant waited for the people to settle in their pews. Then he licked the tip of his index finger, turned a page in the bible, and cleared his throat. When the last whisper at the back of the church had faded he perched his spectacles on the bridge of his nose and read.

"Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord..." He peered over his glasses at the audience. "Our sins won't go unpunished folks. The Lord sees every wicked thought, every drink taken in secret." His eyes seemed to rest on individuals as if with intent. "The gambling. Even the dancing."

Anna felt a pang of guilt, though it didn't seem fair. In her first year at university she'd allowed herself but one indulgence. She swallowed. How could an evening of big band swing be a bad? Hadn't the great King David himself danced with abandon before his God?

The preacher glanced down at the page and then up and to one side, as if inspecting the cobweb in the spandrel of a nearby arch. "But the Lord was not in the wind..." He straightened his glasses. "After the wind there was an earthquake..." This time he focussed on the choir mistress. "But the Lord was not in the earthquake..."

Anna looked up from her bible. The predikant was one of those ministers who could make every person in an audience feel like he is looking at them alone. He waited a moment too long before dropping his eyes to the text.

"After the earthquake came a fire..." He removed his reading glasses to polish their lenses. After replacing them he said, "But the Lord was not in the fire..."

Anna looked at Kleinjan through the sides of her eyes. Strange: he'd shifted to the far side of the pillar. She turned to confirm. Only then did she see the other man sitting next to him. He was robed in black, with an expression that brooked no fool. Like the predikant, except white. Must be the missionary.

"And after the fire came a gentle whisper..."

The missionary's gaze drifted in her direction, held her eyes for a moment. Then he bent his head in prayer.

The predikant closed the bible with a thud. "Hear the word of the Lord."

The service ended and Anna filed out behind Joanna. Eventually they spilled out into a clearing behind the church. Soon there were congregants milling about a shaded clearing, exchanging news. The hub-hub of voices drowned the twitter of sparrows from the branches above. In the midst of the assembly, was a rusted diesel pump, and to one side the elongated low-rise structure of the mission store. Like all the other buildings in town, its entrance was boarded. Across the clearing, downstream from a catchment pond, was a water-mill. The slosh and creak of its wheel was just audible above the wind brushing the willow trees above them.

Anna waited for a pause in conversation to break away from Joanna, and made a beeline for Kleinjan. He was standing in a group of men in the shade of a palm, his back to the stoep of the mission store. She took him at the wrist. "Excuse us," She said, smiling at the others. "Kleinjan promised to show me the water mill."

They got to the double storey thatched structure and stopped. Blocking the path was a narrow bridge which carried water via a trough from the catchment pond to the water wheel. It was chest high and on it was a sign.

'Blessed are the lowly," she read aloud.

Kleinjan chuckled. "They say this is proof that Germans have a sense of humour."

When they got to the wheel, Anna's smile had drained.

"What's wrong, Miss Anna. You look like you saw a ghost."

"Unlike Papa," she said. "I've always treated you like an equal. You, Hannah, Willem: I thought we were friends."

Kleinjan glanced over her shoulder in the direction of the church. Through the palm fronds the sky was a crochet of cloud and blue. The congregants were still there, but their voices were muffled behind the splash and groan of the wheel. "But we are," he said, one eye squinting. "You're like the daughter I don't have."

"Then you wouldn't lie to me, would you?"

"Of course not." He eyed her: "Why do you ask such a thing?"

She watched water cascade off the end of the trough and fall into the rectangular buckets on the circumference of the wheel. "What were you doing," she said. "The night before last?"

Kleinjan looked at his feet. Above him a dove cooed cooed from the oak tree. He lifted his head and looked her in the eye for several seconds before answering. "You're a clever lady." He shook his head. "Very clever."

Anna waited.

"Please. If Baas Stefan knows I spoke to you about this, he'll kill me."

Anna nodded.

"I didn't want to do it," he said. "Promise. I hate myself for it. But...but..."

"It's all right."

"Don't think less of me for it," he said. "He threatened my job. Rietvlei's all I have."

"A person always has options. You for example...you could go back to thatching."

"At my age?" He straightened his back as if in pain. "Spending months away from home? No. Hannah's not well, you know."

"I understand what you are saying," she said. "But helping the Germans?"

Kleinjan looked across the clearing. The missionary stood at the edge of a group, looking about. "They're not all bad, you know," Kleinjan said. "Take Gustav there. He came out here ten years ago." Kleinjan turned to face her. "Gave up everything." He pointed toward a copse of trees at the end of a path. It was as thick as a broom's brush. "You see down there. Past die Heer-se-Bos...There's a graveyard. Exactly nineteen headstones. Twelve of them for infants." He looked her in the eye. "Two are his."

"Of course there are some good Germans," she said. "But they're governed by Nazis, and we're at war with them. And don't for a minute believe the lies they're telling the volk. Elim, Wuppertal, Genadendal: same nonsense everywhere. They won't liberate you, give you back the land."

A gust of wind rustled through the branches above them, causing the dappled sunlight to tap-dance off the droplets falling from the wheel's paddles. "Thomas," she said. "He's involved, isn't he?"

Kleinjan nodded. "He's the commander."

Anna's teeth clenched. Though she'd known it deep down, it was still disappointing. She berated herself for eighteen hours of wishful thinking. She said, "He's what?"

"Officer in Command. I thought you knew that. Of the U-boat."

Anna watched the water wheel's spinning become a blur. "Submarine? I thought it was a raider."

He kicked at the ground.

"And...the other guy? Kurt. The silent one."

Kleinjan's lips quivered.

"What's wrong?" she said

He looked away. "He's...he's a dangerous man."

"Why?"

The wind sighed through the willows.

"Tell me," she said. "What are those people doing here? On shore, I mean, with us? Wouldn't it have been safer for them to stay aboard ship?"

Kleinjan shifted on his feet. He was looking at her but his eyes were blank. "That's all I know. Promise. I just loaded the meat and vegetables."

Anna realised the moment had passed. The clam had shut again. She looked past her one-time mentor. The missionary had broken from the group and was wandering down the lane toward die Heer-se-Bos. Though he passed just a dozen yards away, he didn't notice them. In his hand was a sheet of paper and a pencil. Was he also involved? Surely not. She was becoming paranoid. Anna had come to Elim in the hope of answers. Instead, she'd found fresh questions.

Chapter 9

The bucolic scenes drifting by the window of the Pontiac did nothing to calm the tug-of-war that had been trading ground between Anna's heart and mind since the conversation with Kleinjan. At her father's insistence she'd spent the first night back in the city, at his Sea Point pied-à-terre. It was the last place she'd have chosen. She needed space, a place to think. But there was no basis to object. Her fellow lodgers were only due to return today. And he held the lease on their lodgings.

The taxi was making steady progress along Victoria Road from the sleepy Atlantic suburb toward the central business district. The air inside smelled of Brylcreem and leather with a hint of aftershave. Anna wound down the window and stared out. A clutch of women stood in the centre of the common chatting under parasols, whilst their children played cricket. She felt a twinge of envy. And regret. Perhaps her father was right. A woman had no place at university.

A pair of elderly men skirted the cricket match, and headed toward a bench. Ahead of them, across from a vlei, was the oval of the race track, now empty. In the distance Anna could just make out the finger of the Victoria and Alfred pier stretching into the bay. Beyond it a battleship steamed past the outline of Robben Island. She sighed. The peace of the day seemed cruelly incongruous with her anguish. It wasn't fair. A girl of her age, shouldn't have to make such an agonising choice.

"The most beautiful Cape in all the world," said the driver as they rounded Signal Hill to the embrace of Table Mountain. It was his first he'd spoken since picking them up outside their apartment with an outburst of fawning. "The sir and the lady from the Transvaal?"

"Bredasdorp," said Anna's father, not flinching from his work. He'd been making notes in the margins of a page. The document – The Minutes of a Meeting of the Agricultural Board, September 1941 – was propped by a stack of official papers. As if irritated, he stopped to dab the nib of his fountain pen on a piece of scrap paper beside him. "Would you believe these people?" he said, looking out the window. They were passing an area of ramshackle buildings on the lower slopes of the hill.

"They're destitute, Papa. Where else are they supposed to live?"

"I don't care. No one asked them to come here." He let the nib of his pen rest in the margin of the page and looked up over his reading glasses. They were perched on the bridge of his nose. "My Engel." His scowl softened. "When are you going to tell me what's really going on?" He placed the pen on the page. "I worry about you, you know."

"That's kind," she said. "I know you do."

He placed a hand on her leg but then removed it as if self-conscious at the gesture. "You must look after yourself. You're all I've got."

"What about Frans? He'll be back at Rietvlei in a few years. You'll have all day to farm together. When you're not running the country, that is."

"Ge. I'm not so sure. He's got a mind of his own that child. And that fiancée...she thinks I'm an ogre."

"It might help if you made the effort now and again. Be nice to them."

"Nice?" He shifted in his seat. Had to grab at the ink bottle to stop it from spilling. Do you think I got to where I am by being a pushover? Why can't they understand that?"

"Ag. There you go again." Anna tugged at his pocket square. It was red to match the pattern of his tie. She laughed. "Just be yourself. The better self." She looked out the window again. Twin plumes of smoke rose from the Dockland Power Station which until recently had marked the shoreline. Now it was surrounded by a wasteland of freshly-dumped ground. "Never mind, they'll come around."

"You think so?" I have my doubts. Anyway..." He adjusted his tie, flicked a speck of dust off his lapel. "At least we've got each other."

She turned. A shaft of sunlight caught his face. The reflection of grey from his skin and his temples made him look older than usual. Vulnerable even. She realised then that in spite of his foibles, she couldn't help loving him.

He shuffled the stack of papers and placed them upside down on the seat. "You still haven't told me what the matter is?"

"Why does it feel like I'm in question and answer time?"

He laughed, deep, with phlegm. Then he said, "Something's troubling you."

Anna shook her head.

"You couldn't sleep last night, hey?"

"Why?"

"A man knows."

She turned, not able to bear eye contact. "How," she said. "You were snoring. Worse even than usual."

"Ag, my girl, you're like a ghost." He pointed to the rear-view mirror. "Look. Bags under the eyes. White as a Merino in spring." Their eyes caught in the reflection. "Still pretty as ever, mind you." He shifted about in his seat to appraise her. "The lucky bugger who—" Then he turned to the window.

She could see, even side on, that his eyes were moist. It was the closest she'd ever seen to him crying. Why the tenderness, why now? A ripple of anger. This world is cruel.

They stopped at a robot. On the right she could make out the minaret of a mosque above the crumbling houses of the Malay Quarter. A man in a waistcoat and fez stood on the far pavement enjoying the morning sun. He gazed toward the sea. Closer by, an urchin fidgeted beside a vegetable stand. When he saw the Pontiac he grinned and stepped off the pavement with a tomato in each hand.

Anna's father rolled down the window. "Come here," he shouted. The boy was close by the window now. His shirt was three sizes too big for him and his toes hugged the cobbles.

"Wait." Her father scrounged in his pocket. He held the boy's eyes and slowly withdrew his hand and put it behind his back with his other hand. The boy offered a tomato.

Her father produced both hands, bunched and knuckles up. "Guess," he said.

"No, Papa."

"Leave me. There's nothing for nothing." He extended his hands to the boy. "Come on, I won't bite."

The boy's eyes were like that of a barn owl, too large for his head. The taxi revved. He pointed at the right hand. His eyes widened as the hand opened. There was nothing.

"Driver," Anna said. "Let's go."

"Wait," her father said. His face softened, as it did on those rare occasions, from the eyes. He turned to the boy. "Keep your tomatoes. There, there, my boy." He opened his left hand. A ten pound note unfurled to the portrait of the king.

The boy's eyes widened further. "Say, mister." He dropped the tomato. "That's too much. I can't..."

"Go on." Her father held his palm out the window. "Take it. Go buy yourself shoes."

The boy hesitated. The taxi revved again. Then he grabbed the note and spun on his heels.

"What is it?" Anna said when they were going again. "You're such a hard man. I've never seen you give a grown man an inch. But with a kid...you can be easy on a complete stranger."

Her father picked up his papers, licked his forefinger and started paging through them. The cloud had descended again, it was how it always ended.

Though it was a full hour before the first committee meeting, there was already a hundred foot line of cars down Parliament Street. Sunlight filtered through the leaves of the oak trees above them and dappled the black of their roofs. A Mercedes with rounded lines and wide sideboards pulled away from the wrought iron palings of the main gate, and another took its place. Then a huddle of reporters converged from nowhere. With one hand they held onto their hats; with the other they clutched cameras. A block of a man in a top hat and black overcoat stepped out. He took two uneasy steps, then turned as if remembering something. His eyes, even from a distance, looked severe beneath rimless glasses. He bowed a fraction and extended a hand to his wife.

"You know who that is, right?" her father said.

A newspaper boy shouted, something about Singapore under threat.

"Ag, no," he said. "What have I said wrong now?"

Anna kept silent. Ahead, the man locked his arm in his wife's and guided her toward the steps of Parliament. Eight Doric columns towered beneath the portico, leaving a visitor in little doubt as to the location of the entrance. Whoever had designed the imposing red brick building had managed to capture the stolid fortitude of the Transvaal Republic and the grandeur of empire. It shouted power. "You know exactly," she said at last.

Her father pretended not to have heard. Ahead the couple was passing through a tunnel of guards bearing rifles, bayonets to the sky. "Daniel's no oil painting," he said. "But would you believe it: the women say he's got sex appeal."

"He's a dreadful individual."

"Careful. You're talking about the next Prime Minister."

"With twenty seven seats? Isn't that a stretch? Even for you."

"Don't be fooled by his looks."

"Professor Pickford-Dunn thinks his policies are unworkable, dangerous even."

"Isn't he your history lecturer?"

"Art history. But he also studied law. And knows politics."

"Hah. Do you think I care what those communists at your ivory tower say? That any of the hardworking people of this land care? They're just snots, you know that. One foot in England, the other in Africa, and their...hanging in the water. Happy to let the place go to the dogs and then run off when things get tough."

"Ag, Papa. We've been through this. You said there are English speakers who are loyal enough to be called Afrikaners. Isn't that what Hertzog said? Your hero. Before you became infatuated with that..." She watched the Malans disappear between the Doric columns. "That grim reaper."

"Liberals will call him names till sheep take swimming lessons, but that doesn't change the facts on the ground. The man's a genius. You don't believe me, read his address to the Assembly." He gazed at the entrance to Parliament where the couple had disappeared. Then he turned to her, eyes wild. "I tell you what. Ask the librarian. Margriet. She'll get you the Hansard. September '39. You've got time before lunch. Trust me. It's poetry."

The Pontiac pulled up at the gate. Anna got out before her father. When he met her at the gate she refused his hand. "You planned it, didn't you?"

He paused at the first guard, as if inspecting him, nodded. Then he straightened, puffed his chest. "What do you mean?"

"Making me sit waiting for you in the library while you carry on all busy and important. I could have been working on my portfolio, or seeing my friends."

"Ge," he said out of the side of his mouth. He took another couple of steps and repeated his routine with another guard. This time he shook his head. "Is that what you think of me? Always the worst."

They stop-started through the foyer. Her father knew everyone they passed by name though not all knew his. They were middle-aged or elderly, men in tight suits, bald or short-back-and-sides, leaving trails of aftershave. Some looked familiar, either from previous visits or the newspapers. She ignored a wink, turned from a sideways glance. Though used to being a rose among thorns, the leers made her feel uncomfortable. Dirty even.

They continued the gauntlet down the corridor. There was something about Parliament - the opulence perhaps, or the nature of the work that went on within its walls - that seemed to imbibe its members with self-importance. It was like a parallel universe where people who were at each other's throats in public became intimates. As if what went on in the world outside was a charade.

She slowed as they passed the entrance to the Assembly. The giant oak throne of the speaker's chair was empty. Draped over the panelling on either side and above it were life-size portraits of the king and queen: as if by their imperious gazes reminding members that whatever they decided upon was subject to higher powers. Men were filing through the doorway in pairs. Some were already seated, chatting. As always, Anna hoped to catch a glimpse of the slender frame of the prime minister with his trademark silver goatee. A rare highlight in an otherwise torturous day.

The three inch door to the library swung on its hinges with remarkable ease. Inside, the air felt close and musty. Three levels of wall-to-wall leather-bound books, broken only by columns of oak. Every dozen feet around the perimeter of the room were reading lamps hung from gold chains. The softness of the carpet was in stark contrast to the marble floor of the corridor.

A first the librarian seated at the reception counter remained glued to her papers. She only looked up when Anna's father cleared his throat. In spite of her double chin and ample padding, she was pretty. It took her a few seconds to swallow her delight of recognition but her blush lingered. She glanced at the clock on the panel opposite her. "Stefan. Hasn't your portfolio committee meeting started?"

"Two minutes," he said. "You remember my daughter, Anna. She needs a place to rest. We're having lunch in the dining hall. Twelve-thirty."

Margriet's eyes swept towards the oval reading tables and hard-backed chairs toward a plush leather chair in the far corner. A balding gentleman in a pinstripe sat with one leg crossed over the other, *The Cape Times* hiding his face. 'Japs cross Jahore' the headline was bolder than usual. She hunched, and spoke from the line of her two chins, softer. "I'm sorry, Stefan. Your spot has been taken. She swallowed her words to a whisper. "And he's UP."

He laughed. "That's what I love about you. Always looking after my back." He pulled out his fob watch. "Listen. Do me a favour." He blinked one eye, then the other. "No..." He coughed. "I mean: pull Daniel's address to the Assembly, of '39." His left dimple broke. "My girl's dying to read it."

There was something in Margriet's smile that bothered Anna. More than insincerity. Could it be jealousy? Or simply embarrassment? Somehow, in her childlike innocence, she'd never considered the idea of her father with another woman seriously. He flirted of course, in his unique blend of brusqueness and manliness. But he'd never gone as far as bringing a woman home to the farm.

"Of course." Margriet said, her eyes weighing Anna and finding her wanting. "There will be space there. Other side of the newspaper stands."

Anna picked up a copy of the Times and found a seat by the window where a solitary shaft of sun lit a column of dust to the floor. The front page was dominated by accounts of Japan's invasion of Singapore Island. After bombing the city for days the yellow horde had taken the next step and crossed the straights. Commentators were accusing the British of sacrificing the colony in a bid to play for time. In the bottom right corner of the page was a filler-article, quoting a retired colonel on South Africa's lack of preparedness for an invasion from the east. Beside an advert for Springbok cigarettes.

She replaced the newspaper and sidled up to the bookshelf on the far wall where there was a line of sight to the librarian, picked out a book, and made to read. At length a man entered the library and walked up to the counter. Anna replaced the book and slipped out. In the corridor, she waited for the library door to suck closed behind her, then made for the ladies room. As always, it was the one tucked away out of sight, well past the men's. Finished, she set off along the route they'd come earlier.

The corridors were empty except for an orderly pushing a tea trolley. Anna clenched her teeth: the lady's eyes had flickered recognition and she made to speak. Anna lifted her chin, eyes forward, and strode past.

She paused on the stairs, looked out over the steel fence palings to the street where the shadows of the branches above criss-crossed the cobbles. She hitched her dress and hurried along, pausing only as she approached the gate. There were only two guards now, one on either side. When a few feet away she tugged at her shoulder strap. Felt her breasts firm against her corset. She tilted her head toward the nearest guard. He was her age. "Lovely day, isn't it?" she said.

“Ma’am.” He blushed.

“It would be crime to sit in there all day, wouldn’t it?” She held the rim of her hat between her index finger and thumb. “Off for a stroll.”

Turning left on Government Avenue, she forced herself to an amble, trying not to think until she was sure she was out of sight. At the bottom of the street she crossed to Government Square, stopping, as always, at the statue of Onze Jan. ‘Is Het Ons Ernst’ the inscription was as grave as the granite it was etched in. The late statesman stared at the barn-like structure of the Groote Kerk across the square. Anna sighed at the memory of boring sermons. And her father’s complaints on having to pay such an exorbitant amount for rights to the pew and only use it four months of the year.

She continued in the direction of the sea, still caught on the horns of her dilemma. She’d spent the past thirty six hours examining it from all points of the compass. Was convinced of the right answer. And yet where was the peace? She passed a young couple at a pavement café, conferring over a pot of tea. A flower seller was propositioning them with a bunch of roses wrapped in yesterday’s *The Cape Times*. At first the man protested. Then he accepted the flowers with one hand, and reached into his pocket with the other. The lady took the flowers, blushing.

Anna stumbled on a cobble. Flowers? Her mind had been sojourning in a landscape swept by trade winds, a place without worry. She rested one hand on the curb, fiddled with the strap of her shoe. Commander of a German U-boat? All night she’d wrestled with images of passenger ships, tilting to icy deaths in the Atlantic. Thinking of the Fuhrer’s command: no survivors. Thomas a killer? It was hard to reconcile. And her father a traitor? Oh why was it so hard to sacrifice her nearest for the many?

As she struggled to stand, a pigeon swept her face, so close she could feel its wind. She ducked. Another dived at her from a lintel. Then another. A car hooted from behind, then sped past her the second she’d stepped aside. She only stopped again at the intersection with Darling Street. There, a gust of wind brushed a packet against her ankles and she stooped to dislodge it. Satisfied, her eyes swept the station across the Parade until they intersected a line of palm trees which ran past the City Hall. In the distance she could just make out the jumble of District Six at the foot of Devil’s Peak.

Just then a double-decker bus rumbled past. On a palette of cream a hand-written sign read ‘Mother City of South Africa’. Mother. Her spirits sank. The dominee used to tell her time was a sure healer. He’d been wrong. She wiped her sleeve across her eyes and continued toward City Hall. Past ramshackle stands and eager hawkers. “Hallo ma’am,” a man with a gap tooth said, “Here’s your luv’ly apricots, peaches and plums.” For once she had no interest in engaging, could barely muster a smile. The fruit seller looked at her as if she was a lunatic at best, or a criminal.

When Anna reached the ridge of trees at the edge of the parade she stopped. Through a gap in the branches she could see the tortoiseshell walls of the Castle. Command headquarters of the South African Defence Force. A Union Jack fluttered over its rampart. Beyond it a head of steam from a passing train curved leeward.

She hurried to fall behind a platoon of soldiers, slow-marching in the direction of the clock-towered entrance. At the approach to a bridge there was a pair of cannons, one on either side of the pathway. She stopped to clutch the railing and allowed the soldiers to continue. Below, the water of the moat was stagnant. She stared at a slime and phosphor log half sinking. How could she go through with it?

Anna felt a tickle in her nose. Fearing the onset of a sneeze, she fumbled in her bag and produced a wad of tissues. As she tried to separate one, a gust of wind pulled it from her hand. In the attempt to snatch it back, her bag tilted and various papers spilled on the stone. Hastily, she gathered them, and then rose.

Her feet felt of clay, now shattering like her will to defy family. She looked to an un-answering sky, turned and stepped from the bridge.

Chapter 10

The boom of the noon day gun scattered the flock of pigeons clambering for crumbs about the well's entrance. Anna shuffled across the poo-splattered paving toward the rim and peered over. Something had caught her eye as she'd strolled past. Like a penlight of sun or a reflection. The hole was as wide as the arm span of a child and twice as deep. When her eyes adjusted to the dark, she could make out a wrought iron grate partially covered by Coke bottles and brown paper bags. There was a trickle of water from below. Nothing out of the ordinary. She was about to leave when a gust of wind swayed a branch of the rubber tree above her, causing sunlight to filter through to the grating. There was a glint on metal below. It seemed out of place in the squalor. But before she could take a closer look, the sun was gone.

She continued her stroll, keeping to the shade. She was on the southern edge of the Company's Garden, an area which, though only a stone's throw from well-trodden thoroughfares, was deserted for much of the day. Water from an open sloop gurgled beside her and the traffic was a distant hum. Across from the ditch was a spiked paling fence and beyond that the grounds of Parliament. She quickened her pace. Papa would be ready for lunch in less than half an hour.

Approaching the exit of the Gardens she saw a beggar slumped on a park bench, his hat buried his face. He had oversized shoes without laces, and his overcoat was at odds with the heat. Her first instinct was to keep to the opposite side of the path. Papa had always said the poor were that way because they were indolent. That giving to them only made the problem worse. But after a year of interacting with the tramps that idled near her residence, she'd begun to realise that life didn't always follow such a packaged tour through the land of cause and effect.

She was almost clear of the exit gate when he coughed. She stopped, not daring to turn. There was something familiar in the hacking. Strange. He'd not looked familiar in passing. She was about to continue when he said, "Come on, ma'am, spare a penny for a foreigner." Her head was swimming. Or was it the trees that were moving? Though she recognised the voice, it was the wrong place and the wrong time.

"Don't mind me," the beggar patted the bench beside him. "Here." He stared ahead like a blind man. "Act like we don't know each other. You're just resting for a while."

She sat as far from him as possible. He shoved a slice of bread across the bench. A gathering of pigeons bobbed closer. Then he tossed a thumb of bread between the birds. There was a commotion as they fought for possession. Eventually a large individual that had held its peace on the edge of the group elbowed the others out the way, pecked the bread off the ground. "We humans are no different," he said as it flew off. "Just fighting for the spoils."

The questions cascaded through Anna's mind. She picked up the bread, broke off a square and threw it onto the path. The guilt that stalked her since leaving the castle had morphed into fear. "We're supposed to meet tomorrow." She was angry. "Hemel, what are you doing here, like this?"

"I'm not sure you'd believe me if I told you."

"And you'd be right. Anyway, you may as well try. Say why bother with the ambush? Unless you want something from me. Yes. Isn't that what you're all about? Using people. My father. Kleinjan. The missionary. Now me."

"Missionary?"

"As fate would have it, Kleinjan and I decided to go to church." A pigeon swooped onto the path and pecked at the crumb. "You've got to be more careful, Thomas. Or is it Hans, or Herman? For someone in the business of espionage, you leave a trail as wide as an autobahn."

"All right..." His face was blank. "So you went to Elim and saw a German missionary. Wirklich? At a Moravian station? No. What else did you see? Also: let me rephrase: what else did they see, or tell you they saw?"

"So: you're denying it? They're honest folk, Thomas. I believe them. Unlike..."

"I'm not saying I've never been to the place," he said. "Just not yesterday. Promise."

"Ge."

"How many were there, Anna? And when? Please. It's important."

"I'm tired of these games." She kicked at a pigeon. It shook the mother-of-pearl of its neck and hopped to one side. Another took its place at her feet.

Thomas slumped back on the bench and adjusted his hat so that the top half covered his face. "All right," he said. "I'm not a salesman. In fact I couldn't think of a more depressing way to make a living...But I'm not a spy."

A squirrel scampered along the branch of an Indian rubber tree above them, and stopped to sniff the air. Anna wanted to look at him but resisted. "Spare yourself. I know."

A group of schoolchildren were entering the park. The boys were in white shirt sleeves and khaki shorts, their socks down around their ankles. The girls wore floral dresses with bows in their plaits. A teacher herded them in a wide berth from the bench. "I'm just doing my job," he said. "The navy's all I've known since boarding school."

Anna felt tension drain. Why now? Why some twisted relief at confirmation of what she knew but still hoped might not be true? "A German officer," she mumbled. "Somehow I imagined them differently."

"What. Like an army ant, marching in formation? With a lisp: speaking like zis." He removed his hat and sat upright. "Have you ever considered that you've been just as brainwashed as us?"

"If you think you're going to convert me..." Anna made to stand. "I'm not my father."

"Sit down." He opened his hand face up on his lap. A chunk of bread lay in his palm. He waited for a pigeon to swoop down and grab it. "I know you aren't. That's why I'm here."

She looked up at the outline of the sun behind the branches, and shivered. "Yes, wasting my time. Telling me things I already know."

Thomas turned to face her. "All right. So we take the gloves off. Aren't you supposed to be in Parliament: waiting like a good girl while Papa attends to affairs of state?"

Anna looked through the paling at the statue of Queen Victoria guarding the façade of Parliament. It reminded her of Fanus' boasts of his student movement's schemes to topple all symbols of British rule. "I won't deny, my father can be imperious," she said. "Yes: his enemies have said nasty things about him – some deserved - but no-one can accuse him of not being a slave for his country."

"I'm sure you're right." Thomas was fixed on her now. "But you didn't answer my question. Where've you been? Just now."

Anna gathered her handbag to her lap and stood. "What business is that of yours? Or anyone's. In this country we're free to come and go as we please. It's called a democracy."

"I think you protest too much." There was no hiding from his stare. "What did you tell them?"

Anna clicked her bag open, then shut it, and looked beyond the exit gate. A tram clanged up Adderley Street and veered right into Wale. It stopped opposite St George's Cathedral with a screech. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said and started toward the park exit.

"The castle's a strange place for a girl to while away the time."

She stopped. The traffic noises faded to the chatter of children. How could he have guessed? It was too much of a coincidence. "You followed me? How dare you."

"Never mind why or how. Just tell me who you spoke to." He made as if to struggle from the bench.

She stared at him. It may have been his rags or his posture, or even the hint of desperation in his voice, but she no longer felt anger or fear, only pity. He was like a just-beached dolphin, still glistening but struggling to breathe. "No-one," she said, relieved to start with the truth. "I was sight-seeing. Fascinating history..."

He put up a hand in protest.

She ignored it and continued. "Built by the VOC- that's the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie - in 1679. Their second attempt. Did you know until recently the sea used to lap its walls? That's where the name Strand Street comes from."

He let his hand drop, evaluating her.

"You know," she continued, "Strand: Beach. Must be the same in German."

"Stop. This isn't the time for joking." He staggered toward her. "What did you tell them? Please. Lives are at stake. Innocents."

Anna was swimming a cross current of anger and sympathy. Part of her wanted to keep him guessing. Goodness knows, he deserved it. The other wanted to reach out and tell all, hear him say that everything was going to be all right.

He placed a hand on her shoulder. "It's in order. You did the right thing."

She looked at him in a blur. Her face now a windowpane in the rain. She shook her head. "You don't believe me, do you?"

His hand firmed. "I don't know."

It was useless she thought. No amount of denying was going to convince him. Both his hands rested on her shoulders now. He smelled good for a beggar. She wanted to wrap her arms about him and stand there forever.

"Even if I don't tell them," she said. "Someone will. The word secret isn't the Strandveld's dictionary."

"I know. I know."

“What are you going to do? The boat. Your men. They could be in danger.”

He glanced down at her chest. It was heaving with every breath and she felt self-conscious. Then he looked up. “All right,” he said. “We’re in this together now. And you already know too much...The men: they will be fine. Also the boat.”

“But how?”

“My second in command has taken her further offshore – where the continental shelf drops off - to wait on the bed of the ocean...Don’t worry: even if the South African Navy dropped every depth charger they possess, they wouldn’t get within a half a mile.”

“But...” she searched his eyes. “How could you have communicated with them? You’ve been on the farm all this time. Now here.”

“You’ll figure it out,” he said. “In fact you already have.”

Anna immediately thought of Elim, of Kleinjan’s cousin Joanna. Vroeteling in Heer-se-Bos, she’d said. The two visitors to Elim. Anna felt like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle she’d been struggling in vain with for the past forty-eight hours were finally fitting. But though the unplugged hole was getting smaller it wasn’t gone. “The missionary?”

He nodded. “I don’t like it either.”

“Sure you don’t.”

“I might not be religious in the traditional sense,” he said. “But I regret it when men of the cloth get caught up in things like this.”

“How did it happen? Practically, I mean. The communication.”

“Simple. He’s got access to more than just a hotline to the Almighty.”

“Meaning?”

“He’s the only agent this side of Port Elizabeth with a transmitter that actually works properly.”

Anna broke his grip and stepped back. “Why are you telling me this? So you can kill me in good conscience? Isn’t that what a Nazi would do without thinking? For volk and vaderland.”

He stepped toward her again. Her heels came up against the paling beside the park gate. “You’re right,” he said. “Those were my orders. From Admiral Dönitz himself. No loose ends.”

Chapter 11

Anna wiped her face with her biceps. Then she bent down to untangle her foot from the gatepost. Keeping her eyes on his, she shifted around the edge of the gate. Two steps to freedom. "I thought you were different," she said. "That I could trust you."

There was the clip-clop of a horse coming from Government Avenue beyond a thicket of bamboo. Out of the corner of her eye she confirmed it was a mounted policeman. He was close enough to call. She thought of her father. The implications. Even if none of his involvement was proven, the family name could forever be tarnished.

Thomas stepped back, his shoulders hunched to act the beggar again. "You didn't, did you?" he said. "Tell them, I mean. No. You're in this too deep already. I thought so. You can't do it."

"Well that makes two of us." Anna slid around the post to the park entrance. A gentleman led by a poodle brushed by her. She was a body length clear of Thomas.

"How so?"

"Kill me," she said. "There must have been half a dozen opportunities since you began to suspect I knew too much. But you shrink every time. So much for the ruthless killer."

"My victims are statistics," he said. "Number of ships. Tonnage. At most they're cartoon figures glimpsed from a periscope. It becomes like a game."

"And when you hear the cries of the drowning sailors flailing amongst the wreckage: is that also a game?"

Thomas looked toward Queen Victoria. Proof that a woman doesn't have to be beautiful to be powerful. "Go," he waved. "Your father will be expecting you."

"But what about us?" she said.

"Us?" his left dimple appeared. "Did I understand you right?" His face stiffened. "You're nothing to me, remember. I'm heartless."

Anna felt desperate. Like something elusive was slipping from her grasp again. A day dream of love. "You said it yourself. We're in this together. We're going to have to get out the same way."

"Relax yourself," he said. "Soon I'll be gone without a trace. What evidence would there be? Footprints in the sand? If the tides haven't sorted them out already."

"What about Kleinjan?" she said. "I'm not sure he'll be able to keep all of this secret."

"The authorities are hardly going to believe the testimony of a coloured farm worker above your father's, are they?"

She eyed him. "So why haven't you left yet?"

He fiddled with his left finger. It was a thick gold band with a lapis lazuli signet.

"I thought you weren't married," she said.

He followed her gaze to the ring. As if by instinct he turned it around so that the signet faced her. "My family crest," he said, tracing the outline on the flat. "That's an estate in Danzig. It was German for centuries, you know." He looked at her.

The bells of St George Cathedral chimed half the hour. Pigeons fluttered up from the pavement. Some chain of cause and effect led her to an idea she never thought she'd have the courage to pursue. She said, "Are you still here tonight?"

He nodded. "Tomorrow night too. In fact it could be a week or more until I'm recalled. Why?"

Her surge of courage ebbed. "Nothing...I just thought it would be nice to see each other again." She poked at a tear in his jacket. "But not like this of course."

"You've just given me an idea," he said. "Your father lent me a suit."

"And?" Anna felt her hands shaking. She clasped at her dress at the waist to steady them.

"You like to dance, right?"

She felt her cheeks warm. "And. What's that to you?"

Thomas shrugged. "Oh, nothing. I was just wondering..."

Anna held up her hand to block the sunlight, looked at him out of a slanted eye. "You're not suggesting..." For a moment her heart ran away from her words. She wasn't used to having to second guess a man. "A, a, dance hall, are you? What's so funny?" For the first time she noticed he'd blacked out a tooth. He clearly wasn't the type for half measures.

Thomas laughed. "I don't bite, you know."

"I'm trying hard to believe you," she said, pouting. "But you don't make it easy. Tell me, aren't you supposed to be keeping a low profile?"

"Yes and no. Besides, there's no better place to be invisible than in a crowd." He stuffed his hands in his jacket and pulled out the pocket liners. "This charade was more for your sake. In case you came with your father. Don't tell him any of this, by the way. He thinks I'm at the machine shop in Woodstock."

They stood an arm's reach apart, staring into each another's eyes. A couple of ladies with broad hats and parasols linked arms in passing. A seagull cawed overhead. Anna fought back a blink, determined not to interrupt the connection. More than her life, she wanted to stay there forever. Not needing anything or anyone.

"I can see you're a stubborn woman," he said, not breaking the stare.

"What does that make you?" She wiped a ringlet of hair which had blown over her eye.

"I'm trained to stay focussed." He made binoculars with his fingers. "Through the periscope, I mean. Whether it's picking out a cargo ship from a convoy or an enemy destroyer. I flinch. I die."

"You're quite something." Her dimples appeared, sank deep but she kept the stare. "The word intense hardly does you justice. Have you always been like this?"

"You mean..." For a moment he looked sad, then recovered. "Was I ever a child?"

"Yes. I suppose. Aren't there times that you let your hair down? Lighten up, I mean. Surely."

He was starting at her but it was obvious he was in another place, another time.

"Did I say something wrong?" she said. "I didn't mean to. I..."

"No. No." He snapped to the present. "It's just this war. It changes people. I've seen boys from my high school - good homes and a mother's love - become...monsters."

They were still fixed on each other.

"All right," she said. "You win." She hitched her dress beneath her breast, glanced down, back. "But I think you need a bit of cheering up. Something to take your mind off things. I tell you what." An idea was forming as she spoke. An audacity growing, that she didn't know she possessed even in seed. "My friends and I are going the Mount Nelson tonight. There's a big band, plays in the ballroom every night of the week."

"Also." He lifted his nose. "That sounds terribly posh." Then he looked down at his tattered coat, scratched his cheek. "I'm not certain it's my scene. Sorry."

"Oh, no," she laughed. "It's not like that at all. Really. It's loads of fun." She felt an urgency rising, tried to suppress it, smiled. "Come on. We're meeting inside at ten."

He was smiling now. Like a yoke had lifted.

She giggled. "You're going to make me say it, aren't you, you beastly thing?" She took his coat by the lapel, rubbed it between her fingers and looked him up and down. "Ten o'clock sharp. Just be sure to get a make-over first. I wouldn't want my friends to think I was desperate."

Chapter 12

Anna was relieved to see that the library door was ajar and she could slip in without announcing herself. Better still, Margriet wasn't at her post. She made a bee line across the carpet for the newspaper stand. There was no-one in sight. Perhaps her absence hadn't been noted, after all. The early edition of the evening paper was already on the rack. Another stunning victory for the Japanese on Singapore Island. Below the headlines was a leader on General Smuts and his wife Issie attending a fundraising event for the Widows and Orphans Relief Fund at City Hall. A photograph of the elderly statesman pressing the flesh among a throng of admirers. When she'd finished reading the article she looked up.

The instant she saw her father, sitting alone in the corner of the room, she knew there was trouble.

"Come sit, Engel."

Anna sunk into the armchair, ending several inches below his line of sight. She clutched her handbag on her lap.

"So." He was sitting with one leg over the other with Die Transvaler folded open on his knee. He tapped it with the end of his fingernail. "A couple of good articles this month. You should try it. Instead of Huisgenoot. Or the propaganda they feed you at university." He picked up the paper, slapped it. "That Verwoerd guy is still the editor. Now there's a man, knows what this country needs."

"Why are you telling me this, Papa?" She wiggled to stand. Fell back. "Aren't we late for lunch?"

"We wouldn't be if you'd been here when we agreed."

"Ag. You know I wouldn't keep you waiting on purpose. I was in the toilet."

He raised an eyebrow. Then he glanced at the door where the face of a parliamentarian had appeared and retreated. "So long?"

She looked away, shrugged. "That time of the month."

"Margriet told me she hadn't seen you for an hour, maybe more."

Anna tried to sit upright but sank back into the chair. She felt like a child who'd stolen the last piece of chocolate from the fridge and lied about it. Stop. Why should he still make her feel that way? It was ridiculous. "You should be so pleased I still agree to hang around this...this place..."

"Kleinjan was just here."

Anna felt the room turn about the axis of the ceiling dome. Three storeys of oak panels, books, reading lights, passing in a blur.

"What's wrong?" he said. "You don't look well."

She fought to steady the room, hands clenched on the arms of her chair. "Oh, nothing. It's just that I thought he was with his cousin in District Six. How did he get in here anyway? I thought servants weren't allowed."

"Wragtag waar. You don't know your father by now?" He chuckled. "I long time ago organised him a pass to come in via the deliveries entrance. With the bakkie of course. He's been running me errands for years. When he's in town of course."

Anna shook her head, kept her smile to a dimple.

His face lengthened. "Any idea why he'd interrupt my committee meeting this morning, unscheduled?"

The sound of tea cups rattling on a cart in the corridor. "I presume you're going to tell me."

The lines about his mouth softened. It was an expression she knew to her core. Of disappointment when someone failed to live up to his expectations, or hadn't listened to a bout of his moralising. "He's worried about you."

The servers outside in the corridor were exchanging gossip in high-pitched vernacular.

"Why didn't you come and talk to me first?" he said.

"What do you mean?"

I'm your father for heaven's sake. I know I can be hard, but when have I ever betrayed your confidence?"

What had Kleinjan said? And why now? He'd been Anna's mentor for most of her life. She'd shared some of her deepest hurts and cares, her secrets. Like the time she'd stolen Papa's brandy to learn what it felt like to be drunk. Or smuggled the English newspapers from the general dealer in Napier. Her first kiss. No, surely he wouldn't have told her father everything.

"Anna?"

Her eyes skipped from the reception counter to the door and back, buying time.

"Don't worry," he said. "You can talk. Margriet's archiving downstairs. The others are at lunch."

She inhaled with the tickle of a wheeze. Her mind scoured reason. Why the tentativeness? If he knew anything of substance he would have thrown it on the table by now. Anna crossed her arms to formulate an attack. She'd had the benefit of a lifetime role modelling a master politician. "With respect, Papa. You're the one that has something to explain."

He folded Die Transvaler and placed it on the side table, breathed out with his shoulders. "Nee wat. Imagine if I'd spoken to my stepfather like this."

Anna clung to the offensive. "Did you think I wouldn't figure it out?"

He unfolded his legs to a vee. "What do you mean?"

"I may be naïve, Papa. Or was until recently. But I'm not stupid."

"Of course you aren't. As I always say: you got your mother's brains..." His laugh had a timid ring to it. "And my stubbornness."

Anna felt a leap of irritation. He was skirting the issue, trying to find out what she knew before playing his hand. There was no way she was going to beat him at his own game. "If you felt so strongly about helping your one-time fatherland," she said, "why couldn't you do it some other way? Why Rietvlei? Why endanger us?"

He leaned forward, lowered his voice. "I'm sorry, Engel. Truly. I don't expect you to understand. Not now, anyway. But know this: more than anything, I was only trying to protect you."

She looked at him. How could he swing her emotions in the space of a few sentences? Perhaps he was horribly misguided, but he was being sincere. For the second time in as many hours, Anna felt like letting go, confessing all. If she couldn't do it to her own father - the man who'd brought her up single-handedly and provided for all her needs - then to whom? Instead she pulled back her shoulders. It wasn't the time to fall back into his shadow. She said, "Just tell me why."

This time it was he who looked away, his eyes lingering on the door. Anna followed, saw what he'd seen. Though it was closing fast, there could be no mistaking: the door had been open.

"Come," he said, standing. "I don't know about you, but I'm not in the mood for the institutional fare they dish us here. Let's go to our favourite. We can carry on talking there." He swung the door outward into the corridor.

"Eina!" A woman's voice, as high-pitched as if she'd seen a cockroach.

"O, jammer tog," he said, looking down at Margriet's high-heeled shoes. "Weren't you supposed to be downstairs sorting?"

She placed one hand on his forearm to steady herself, left it there, and adjusted her heel with the other. Bending over had the effect of exaggerating her already substantial bosom. She waited until he'd indulged his view. "Ag, my lief. By now you should know how efficient I am. I just thought I'd get some fresh air."

Anna had a close-up view of the librarian for the first time. Clearly war rationing hadn't been extended to cosmetics. The result was a face once pretty enough for a fashion model but now severe, lips rimless about a cruel mouth. Anna tugged her father's arm from hers, thrust forward her chest. "Got to go," she said. "Papa and I have a date."

Her father's grip tightened on her wrist. She had to almost skip to keep up with him as he strode, pigeon-chested and tall, along the corridor. "So," she said as they passed the entrance to the assembly. "What matters of national import are you going to be deciding this afternoon?"

"Wragtag," he said, "Since when were you interested? Didn't you fall asleep last time?"

"Is that what they told you?" Anna giggled. "I was pretending, silly." She elbowed him. "I just couldn't bear all those dirty old men ogling me from down there. To think they're married, some with grandchildren. Sies."

Outside, the South Easter was at full strength and the front edge of a cotton wool tablecloth was cascading down its face. As they approached the guard at the entrance gate, Anna tried to distract her father by pointing to the mountain. Instead he stopped in front of the youngster. After appraising his dress, he flicked a speck of dust off his lapel and stepped back.

The guard shuffled his feet to attention. "Ma'am." It was as though he didn't know where to look. "Did you enjoy your walk?"

"Oh, comme ci comme ça." She smiled for time, watching a taxi draw to a halt outside the gate.

"What was that all about?" her father said when they'd meandered out of earshot down Parliament Street. "I thought you were in the library. That time of the month, nè?"

Anna didn't respond. They turned left and strolled down Parliament Alley toward the elbow of Wale and Adderley Streets. On the right was the Old Supreme Court building, windowless from its former

incarnation as the slave lodge of the Dutch. In the rose garden opposite, Queen Victoria clutched her diadem, severe. Even in the relief of a royal mason, she wasn't pretty.

"Have you seen Thomas?" her father said. The sandstone bell tower of St George Cathedral reappeared through the trees.

Anna swallowed. Could he read her mind? She turned to follow a tram's progress as it trundled down Adderley Street toward what had recently been the pier. She remembered the last time she'd been there before the land reclamation. How her mother had treated her to a candy floss from the stash of pounds she kept in her jewellery jar to avoid her husband's rants on the wasting of money on trifles.

"What was that?" she said when a car horn broke her dream. You mean the...Southwester. How would I know? Aren't you friends?"

"Colleagues. He was supposed to call my secretary to make arrangements for dinner tonight. Instead he's disappeared."

They were at the triple-gated entrance to the Gardens now. Skirting the remains of an ice-cream, spreading from an upturned cone. Her heartrate was above her stride. Thankful for a group of people between them and the bench she didn't want to see.

"If he makes contact, you must tell me. Promise?"

Anna felt tension leach. Her pace slowed. The bench was empty save for a pigeon tussling a bread crust. Her eyes stayed on the path, aware only of the crunch of her father's leather on the stones beside her. Though they were in the shade of the fig tree she was hot. "Why would he?" she said at last. "He's your...colleague."

The crunching grew louder until he drew level. "I'd say he's smitten, that's why."

They were rounding a bend now. The well she'd stopped at earlier was ahead and to the left. This time the paving was devoid of pigeons and people. Without looking at her father, she said, "No. You don't mean..."

"Jong. The way he looks, asks about you. A father knows these things."

They were beside the well now. Anna thought to lean over, check if the scratch marks she'd seen on the grating had been an illusion. Considered mentioning something, but said instead, "That's why Kleinjan came to speak with you this morning, isn't it?" She took his forearm. "He thinks I'm going to do something silly. Come on, admit it."

He looked at the sun, held up his hand to block it.

"I'm right, aren't I?" she said. "Nee wat; you two are as bad as each other. If you're not trying to keep me from a man, you're trying to match make me."

He swallowed. Eyes flitting from one side to the next before focussing on her. "Thomas isn't right for you," he said. "You've got to trust me. Too old for one thing."

"Ag, there you go again. Still trying to run my life." Anna tugged at his arm, steering him across the paving to where the path continued into lush tropical foliage. She was fed up with his patronising. Worse, the cruelty. This was the same man who'd torn her childhood friend from her because he was the wrong colour. But she had to appear unruffled. it wasn't the time to lose her temper. "All

right," she said. "I'll admit it: he's nice. And we had some good conversations. But romance? Not a chance."

"Listen here." He cleared phlegm from his throat. "I don't want you to see him again. You understand?"

She slowed her pace, tried to regulate her fury before putting anything to words. He could say what he liked but she didn't have to obey. Not at all costs. He could make life difficult, throttle the flow of funds. But in less than two years she'd be independent. She said, "Reg so."

His eyebrows closed in on one another, his mouth closed and upper lip protruding. It was the look he had when pleased with himself.

"But only..." She dug her fingernails through his shirt sleeve. They were following the path parallel to the Government Avenue, separated from the other pedestrians by a spiked paling fence and a ditch. "If you tell me the real reason you don't want me to see him."

He jerked his arm from her grip. The whiplash effect caused her hat to topple. She struggled her arm free. "Look what you've done now." She stooped to pick up the hat, dusted it off. "I won't be treated like this."

"Sorry, lief. I didn't mean to... It's just... You must be careful what you say."

"Stop trying to justify yourself," she said, hands on hips. In that moment she wanted to reach out and strangle him. "Besides, I didn't say anything. I just asked a question." The wind sighed through the branches above them. A handful of yellowed leaves floated down and settled on the path. Then she noticed his expression, a first in twenty years. His eyes were flicking to and fro. Like he was unsure. More than that. A look of panic.

"O, Hemel," he said, fumbling in his pocket as if having remembered something. As he pulled out his watch, a handkerchief fell out, flew forward in a gust and into the ditch. The flow of the stream pushed it up against a nest of sticks where it started to sink. "Bliksem..."

When he reached down to retrieve it Anna noticed for the first time that the hair on his pate was thinning. It somehow made him seem frailer. He squeezed the water from the handkerchief, still staring at the water. "That's quite a current. Who would have believed it? In the middle of a Cape summer, nogal."

"Yes, it's the Platteklip Stream. Comes from the mountain. And to think that's just scratching the surface."

"What do you mean?"

"Ag. I was reading the other day. There were all these canals running from the mountain to the Gardens. And the castle. The Dutch built them way back, called them grachts. Cape Town was like a little Amsterdam."

"And: what happened?"

"The British said they were a health hazard. Covered them up."

"Typical." He shook the handkerchief and folded it to a square. "Right. Where was I?" He opened his watch. "Yes. Yes. Of course." He looked up at her.

She recognised the expression in a flash. That maddening prelude to obfuscation, the intrusion of something more important. She waited for the inevitable.

"I just remembered," he said. "I'm supposed to be meeting with Daniel before the session. Really have to be there. Siestog. He's having such a hard time of it. Did I tell you we have a faction, want to walk out of session tomorrow?"

He glanced at her, away, then back at his watch. "That was five minutes ago. Oh, Engel. I'm so sorry. Can we make our lunch tomorrow?"

She waited, knowing what would follow.

He pulled out a pound note. Money: his stock-in-trade offering for absolution. "Here. Spoil yourself. He winked. "And don't bother with the change."

Chapter 13

Anna stood at the edge of the dance floor and watched another couple swing-waltz past her and head towards the band on the far side of the ballroom. A pianist sat, a cigarette smoking on his lips, and caressed his baby grand. He paused just long enough to make eye contact with the lead singer, then continued. To one side of the duo was a row of trumpeters, two saxophonists and a cellist. On the other was a drummer, teasing a cymbal with a drumstick and treading bass. Collin's Dance Orchestra, it read in cursive on the skin of the drum. Anna's eyes settled, yet again, on the wall clock that peeked from a drapery of flags. The Hammer and Sickle had pride of place next to the Stars and Stripes and both were flanked by Union Jacks. It was thirty-one minutes past ten o'clock but still there was no sign of Thomas. Her irritation, long-since boiled to anger, had settled on worry.

The lead singer coughed into the bulb of the microphone. Then he ran his hand through his hair and wiped his fingers on the seam of his trousers. He was wearing a double-breasted jacket, cream, with a black tie, and his face was round and insincere. "This one ladies and gentlemen..." He waited for the hub-hub to fade. "Is dedicated to our allies across the pond." He nodded to a man standing in uniform, alone like a pillar in the centre of the dancefloor. "Oh! Look at me now," the lead singer said, and winked at the officer's partner. "By Frank Sinatra. Hope you like it folks."

The lights dimmed. Anna watched her friends Elizabeth and Agnes being led to the dance floor by partners. Some civic organisation had arranged them from a visiting ship. Rather her than me, she thought. Too wet behind the ears and cocky. He drew her close, as if needing to whisper in her ear. She giggled in turn, hand on his shoulder, and toed him at the heel.

"Excuse me," a man's voice broke through the music.

Anna ignored it. Six men had already asked her to dance and she'd refused each one without explanation.

A hand rested on her shoulder. Still she didn't look. The voice was in her ear now. "Say, ma'am. Would you happen to know where a man can buy a drink?"

Though she'd rehearsed her opening lines a hundred times during the tedium of the afternoon's sittings, Anna was still adrift of words. She listened helplessly as the saxophonists drawled. From the piano came a trickle of notes and a familiar chorus. Still she couldn't move. The hand slid from her shoulder to her side and rested on her waist. The first thing she noticed when she turned was his suit. It was just like her father's, dark navy and hanging a size too large.

"Thomas? You scared me."

He pressed the bridge of his wire-framed glasses to his nose. His fringe was coiffed and his beard had been trimmed to a goatee. He could have been a carbon copy of portraits of Jan Smuts as a young man. The only difference was the smile. He offered his hand. "Care to dance?" The band had slowed. On the dancefloor, couples drew close.

Anna felt as if she was drifting above the chandeliers. Snow drops of light sprinkling the hall as the dancers made choreographed twirls.

"I'll understand if you're angry," he said, hand extended. "Like you, I hate it when people are late."

"No. It's not that." She looked at her feet. A flutter of panic. "It's just...I've hardly ever danced the tango. I'll..."

"Come."

Anna felt him taking her hand. It was cool and firm. She found herself following, silent but willing. He stopped at the edge of the dance floor, took her left hand to his side. His other was at her waist drawing her closer without trying. She leaned toward him, felt his chest hard against her breasts. For several beats they stood rocking an inch from side to side, as though waiting for the music to possess them. They'd moved several feet backwards before she realised they were dancing. Certain he was holding her, yet not feeling his hands. As if he was leading more with intuition than force or intent.

"See." His voice was touching her ear after they'd completed the figure-of-eight of a backward ocho. "You're a natural."

She laughed. "And you're a terrible liar. Goodness, navy man, where did you learn to dance?"

"Tanzschule," he said. "A rite of passage for every German boy." He laughed. "But only for the adel, of course." He took her through another figure of eight, and paused as preparing to turn. Her leg folded over his leg, doubled back at the knee. Then they were still, the song over, yet clinging to the embrace.

"Why does this have to end?" she said.

"Quiet now," he said. "There'll be another. We've got all night."

"No." She was squeezing his hand, her breathing fast and shallow. Hoping it wouldn't falter. "I mean us. There's no future. It's so cruel."

For several beats he was silent. She could feel his hand, firm on the small of her back. Hoping he wouldn't notice her perspiration. Next thing his chin brushed the top of her shoulder, and she was swirling. They were in front of the band now. She could see the lead singer's scalp beneath the Brylcreem of his hair. Ignored his wink.

"Be still," Thomas said. "Don't care for tomorrow. We're here now. That's all that matters."

There was a pause in the beat. Anna rested her face on his shoulder. Smelt musty cotton and her father. "Don't go, she whispered. No. No. Don't go."

"Can I tell you a secret?" he said in her ear.

She smiled. "You've been telling me nothing else since we met."

"Funny. No, this I didn't even know until today." He slid his right leg between her hers, first the toe of his shoe then his thigh. She wanted to freeze, instead her balance tilted, leg swinging out. And yet again they were walking. "I've never been in love."

Anna laughed, more from nerves than humour. "Don't play with me, Thomas." She parted an inch. "You're telling me...Your fiancée...Surely."

He shook his head and led her into a forward ocho. When they paused, he said, "I once thought it was love. This is true."

Anna felt his hold tightening. She'd never been as close to man. Frightened, yet secure.

"I want to see more of you," he said.

"Stop..." She drew away.

"What is it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't know anything anymore. It's just...I can't help thinking what they'll do if they catch you." She felt warm again. Needing fresh air. Scared her breathing would falter. "Sorry. What am I saying? Oh, Thomas. You're from another world. Think about it. You're older for one. German. And engaged."

He paused to rock forward and backward, his leg brushing her thigh again, gently. "None of that stuff matters. Now, we are here together."

Two steps later they were in a twirl. There was no-one else in the room. Only one thing mattered in the stretch of eternity. Anna said, "Tomorrow. The next. You must know it's only a matter of time before they catch you. What are you going to do?"

The tango reached its final, lingering note. Thomas held her body still and slid her foot outward with his own. "Nothing," he whispered at her ear. "Just wait."

Neither seemed willing to be the first to move. Soon the trumpeters were tapping their instruments to drain them of spittle and the lead singer mopped his brow. Only when one of the other band members tapped the microphone to announce an intermission did Thomas relax his hold. Keeping her hand in his, he led her back to the table. Once seated, he hailed a waiter. The man was dressed in a tuxedo with white gloves and he arrived with a smile. Thomas pointed to two untouched Scotch and sodas of the couple next to them and held up two fingers.

As they waited for their drinks, Anna scanned the hall. She was relieved to see her friends still on the dance floor. Then she rested her elbows on the table and leaned toward him. "What do you think of the band?"

"Not bad. They play with passion."

"They sure do. Did you know they played at the Coronation Ball in '37 here in Cape Town?" The waiter arrived and deposited their Scotches with a flourish. "Maybe that's why the police let them play here. In this part of town."

Thomas looked at her for several seconds. "You're shaking."

She looked at her glass. The clear liquid twinkled in the light from the chandelier above them. "I'm sorry." Her eyes darted about the room, behind and to her left. "We shouldn't be here. It's all my fault."

Thomas ran the stirrer around the inside of his glass, chasing ice cubes. The white handkerchief in his chest pocket was a triangle and appeared to glow.

"When did you take Papa's suit?" she said. "Does he know? I mean, about you and I being here? If so he'll..."

"Say, now." Thomas steadied her glass with his hand. "You're seeing his ghost about every corner. You've got to learn to relax." He smiled a dimple. Don't worry: I haven't spoken to him since we arrived in Cape Town. I promise. He lent clothes when I came ashore. Almost a whole wardrobe."

She stared at him, thinking they were the first words she'd heard from him she could be certain were true.

“Zum Wohl.” He clinked glasses, sipped at his whisky and swirled before he swallowed. “If it’s any help: I’ve learned as a submariner to take it one day at a time. One hour in fact. Lying a hundred and fifty feet down on the ocean bed with a destroyer raining depth charges you get philosophical.”

Out of the corner of her eye Anna saw Elizabeth leading her partner from the dance floor toward their table. ““But not reckless,” she said. “Surely. You wouldn’t have survived this long.”

“This is true,” he said, placing his glass on a coaster. “I know about your conversation, by the way.”

“What do you mean?” That sinking feeling again. Anna took a sip, swallowed the burn.

“With your father. Before lunch.” He held up a hand. “Don’t ask,” he said. “It gets complicated. Just let me say this: he doesn’t know everything that gets around. Even if he thinks he does.”

Anna let his words linger. “What are you saying?” She put her glass on the table. “He’s admitted to allowing an underground railway through the Overberg to supply enemy ships and you tell me there’s more to it?”

His face hardened but with trim and lines he looked more handsome still. “Sorry,” he said. “I’ve said too much already. My orders came through this afternoon. I’m to leave Sunday. No further contact with anyone. Even our own agents. Now I really have to go to ground.”

Anna felt a sinkhole in her heart implode. “So, that’s it,” she said. “Just like that. You gate crash my life and steal my heart. And then...Then you...”

Thomas took her hand in his, caressed her fingers. “It may not seem like it now,” he said. “But this madness won’t last.”

“What do you mean?”

“The war. There’s no way Hitler can win now. Think of it. Three months ago he declared war on the United States, as if he was just waiting for Pearl Harbour for an excuse. That while our forces are already bogged down by the Russians. The man’s a fool. It’s only a matter of time.”

“Time?” she drained her glass and thumped it on the table, then stood. “When did love ever just stand still and wait?”

Elizabeth appeared from the crowd, hips swaying. She sat down two empty chairs away. Her partner stayed standing behind her, and began to massage her neck. Then Agnes and her sailor boy arrived, giggling.

Anna stood. “Come,” she said. “I’m not feeling well. Let’s go.”

“So soon?” Elizabeth said, pouting at Thomas. “I was hoping Frank Sinatra here would ask me for a dance before the night was out?”

Anna bristled. “I take it you haven’t met.” She turned. “Thomas, let me introduce you. This is Elizabeth, my flatmate. Her father’s also in Parliament.”

She cocked her head at him. “On the opposite bench, of course.” She laughed. “Goodness me, he sure manages to wind old Stefan up. Especially when he raises the Native question.”

“Oh, stop,” Anna said, irritation rising. “Why do you always have to bring that up?”

“Stefan’s crowd thinks they should be...” Elizabeth ignored Anna’s glare. “Suppressed. You know, kept in their homelands, the locations, says they belong there. That they’re no better than—” Her drink

rattled and spilled over at the force of Anna's kick to the shin. "What is it?" she turned to Anna. "That is what they say isn't it? That ghastly fellow Malan has even got a name for it. Apartheid, or something like that in Afrikaans. You'd know better." She stirred her drink. "Father says that's a disaster in the making, going to keep this country back a hundred years...What's wrong...?" she looked at Anna and back at Thomas. "It's God's truth, I tell you. A bloody disaster in the making. The qualified franchise, that's the way to go. Educate them first."

Anna's irritation had given way to anger. "Oh, back off, Elizabeth. How many times do I have to tell you how much I abhor everything that Malan creep and his cronies stand for? Father or no father. They'll fossils, all of them." She drained her glass and smacked it on the table. "I'm tired," she said, making to stand. "It's been a long day." She took her handbag from the chair and slung it over her shoulder. "Goodnight everyone."

"Anna," Thomas called after her as she disappeared down the stairs. He caught up with in the street. "At least let me walk you home."

When he caught up with her she slowed, and they strolled alongside each other down the palm-lined hotel driveway toward Orange Street. The night air was balmy and the stars beyond the fronds were bright in contrast with the blackened city sky. At the entrance ahead of them loomed the white fluorescent glow of the colonnade. A guard, she knew as Robert, stood erect beside a boom.

They were in Orange Street, which was deserted except for a couple of patrolling taxis. Across the way was the top gate of the Company's Garden. There was scent of roses about but it was all but overpowered by the smell of the sea on the air and kelp. The only sound apart from the purr of the taxi engines in the distance was their shoes on the paving.

"Evening, ma'am," called the guard. "You're home early. Everything in order?"

"Don't worry about me, Robert. I've got a chaperone."

When they reached the corner of Hof Street she stopped, turned to Thomas and peck-kissed him on the forehead. "I must go alone from here," she whispered. Our residence is just there." She pointed beyond the intersection. There was a cypress hedge and behind it a light. "We couldn't risk a rumour that I'd taken a man home."

"Where I come from," he said, taking her hand. "We always escort the lady to her home." He led her around the corner. The moment they were out of sight of the guard he was holding her. This time closer, even, than the dance. Her first thought was guilt. It couldn't be happening, shouldn't. Then anticipation. Was he waiting for her to respond?

She drew back a couple of inches as if to consider. Then something caught her eye from over his shoulder. A truck was speeding toward them, a Ford pickup, like they used on the farm. She was about to dismiss it when she saw the passenger's face. Then she stepped back just enough to slip from Thomas' embrace. His arms fell to his side, now limp, like those of a mannequin turned the wrong way.

"What's wrong now?" he said. "Am I too forward? Sorry. It's the European way."

"No. No." She tried not to look behind him at the truck. It was pulling up at the entrance to the Gardens. The back was covered by a tarpaulin. She met his eyes for a second and then was distracted again. The passenger had hopped out of the truck. In an instant he was lost in the shadows of the foliage. "I'd better be going."

"Forgive me," he said. "If I made you uncomfortable."

Anna shook her head harder than she'd intended. "No. I've never felt more at ease with a man in my life. Really. It's not that." The truck pulled away and revved off in the direction of the city. "Thomas," she whispered as she refocused on him. "Something's been bothering me. Since Friday. I couldn't put my finger on it until now."

"Yes?"

"What happened to your colleague? The quiet one."

Thomas's eyes narrowed. "You mean Kurt?" He ran the underside of his thumb up his chin, bristling his growth. "Interesting you should ask." He was impossible to read in the shadows. "I was wondering the same thing. "Also," he said. "That boy is like a cat. He walks alone."

"Come on," she pressed. "You telling me you don't have a clue where he is? You're on the same side, aren't you? Creatures of the sea together..."

Thomas breathed out through his teeth, shook his head. His voice was low and blended with the breeze. "It might come as a surprise to you to know the German armed forces don't always see eye to eye."

"What are you saying?"

He hesitated. "Kurt isn't regular navy. Worse: he doesn't report to me."

Anna was listening but not believing. It had been a day of lies, counter lies and denials and she was tired. She sighed. "I thought you were the U-boat commander."

"How shall I say this?" Only his eyes were visible from the outline of his face, reflected starlight. "We're a tight-knit lot in this wolf pack: we have to trust each other implicitly. I didn't want him on the patrol. Tried to stop it."

"Save your lies, Thomas." She put a foot on the first stair, spoke over her shoulder. "I really must go."

"Wait." Thomas stepped toward her, reached out a hand to take her sleeve. "I understand. After what you've seen and heard these past days you have every reason not to listen to a word I say. It is just—"

She appraised his figure against the lamp light. Though his jacket was rumpled and unfastened and his sleeves rolled to different lengths, there was something regal in his bearing. She waited a few seconds for her head to catch up with her heart, then said, "I'm going to have to tell somebody about what's going on, you know."

He stepped up the first stair toward her. The top two buttons of his shirt were loose and below them the sweat on his collar bone shone yellow from the street lamp. Though he'd breached her comfort zone she was determined to hold her ground. Thinking how ironic it was that a man could at once be so attractive and frustrating.

"I thought we'd been through this," he breathed. A strand of music filtered through from the crack in the doorway.

Anna felt her spirits plunge. She lowered her eyes to his feet. "My thoughts do no end of circles," she said, sensing her pain reflecting from the toe cap mirrors of his shoes. "But they always return to the inevitable."

"Meaning?"

"That I couldn't live with myself - I didn't do anything about it, this business. Can't you understand that? Put yourself in my skin for just a moment. South Africa is more than my country. It's made me who I am."

"So what do you expect me to do now?" He cocked his head to catch her eyes. "You solve your dilemma but create a new one for me."

"No...I think there is another way." She let his hand cup her elbow and stay there. "But you're going to have to trust me."

A sailor in his ice cream suit and beret stumbled past along the sidewalk. Anna recognised him from the dance - he'd been drinking heavily. He crooned the chorus of some love song she didn't recognise, staggered into the street. Soon the air was still again save for the muffled music from beyond the palms.

"You're going to have to give me more to hang on to than a blind assurance," Thomas said. "Please. Otherwise, you know I'll have to...do something."

"It's not all bad," she said. "I've thought the thing through carefully. Done little else the past forty-eight hours. There's...there's a middle path, you know - one we can both live with. I promise."

Even in the dark the arch of his eyebrows was noticeable. "Didn't some wise Englishman once say that if it sounds too good to be true, it is?"

"It's my solemn duty." Her hand rested on his shoulder. "To tell the powers that be." She waited as a seagull swooped past and alighted on the drain beside the road to peck at the contents of a wrapper. "But not necessarily right away. Think about it: you'd be forewarned, have enough time to leave the city, the country. And...the authorities...I could start in a roundabout way. There's sure to be some delay between departments. It would give you that little bit of extra time."

"I see." He stroked his chin as if he still had his beard. "And what authorities are you thinking of?"

She hesitated.

"Anna...You must give me just a little something to work on. I also have to explain my actions to my people."

A taxi driver drew up close by them and Anna indicated to the driver to wait. "I told you about my art history professor," she said. "Didn't I?"

He held his index finger pinched to his thumb at his chin. "Pickford-Dunn?"

"I'm impressed," she said. "You're quite the observer."

"Names. Places. Times...These are the currencies I live or die by."

"Oh, come on," she smiled and pushed him in play. "Do you always have to be this melodramatic?"

The taxi stopped close by and wound down his window. He let his hand hang out and drummed his fingers on the metal of his door.

"Calm down," Thomas shouted, feigning a South African accent. "The lady and I just want to say our goodnights." After dismissing him with a wave, he turned back to Anna. "You appear to have great admiration for this professor." His face crinkled a smile. "Are you sure it's just his intellect?"

Anna laughed. The angst she'd felt just moments ago had evaporated. "Oh...No, silly. It's just...well...he has connections."

"And what does that mean?"

Anna felt tired. She thought of her bed. Warm, clean sheets, and security. The events of the past week had finally caught up with her. She said. "I can't tell you anymore, at least not now. Just give me a chance. I'll speak to him tomorrow. Even if he does break my trust, which I doubt very much, you'll have more than enough time to finish your business and clear out."

He paused, his expression changing from thoughtful to sceptical. "You ask a lot of me, don't you, Anna?"

"And you of me."

"All right." He straightened, turned his head in the direction of the taxi, idling next to the kerb. "One moment. I'll be there now." He turned back to Anna, shrugged. "Also, what can I say? I will go." He paused. "But I ask just one thing before you go."

Anna could no longer see the contours of his face against the light from the street lamp. "Oh, all right. Fire away."

He smiled. "Can I see you tomorrow night? One last time before I must go."

Anna inhaled. The air was cool and spread through her lungs and it felt good. A strange sensation rippled down her abdomen, making her thighs tingle. "I don't know," she said. "I really ought not to. It's not...appropriate for one thing." She thought of all the times she'd chosen to do what was expected of her, the right thing. But who decided that, anyway? Before it had been simple: her father, the dominee, an overbearing conscience. But lately the black and white had blurred. "I tell you what..." It felt like the first time in her life she was daring to allow her feelings to override reason. "Let's try Oddfello's Lodge, down on Hope Street. It's a dance hall." She could sense his half grin in the shadow, added, "I must warn you though..." She smiled. "It's not the Mount Nelson."

"What do you mean?"

Don't look so worried," she laughed. "It's a fun scene. Just...how can I say...a little different."

Chapter 14

Anna dipped her knife into the Marmite jar, scooped a wedge of the black goo and spread it across her toast. Then she spooned her hardboiled egg from its shell and fork-mashed it over the toast. Leaving it to cool, she padded across the kitchen floor to switch on the wireless. Gggg. She bent over to tune the frequency nob. A spike in volume, another gggg, dial back. After the third attempt she found the BBC. Returning to her seat, she divided her toast in diagonals, placed her fork on the plate and listened.

“Our brave men and their loyal counterparts from the dominions are preparing to advance across the desert,” the Churchill voice droned, “Confident that this time the Axis menace of the Desert Fox will be driven back across the Mediterranean for good.” Anna sipped at her coffee, savouring the warmth and foretaste of caffeine. It had been her fourth night of fitful sleep and the world was losing its lustre. “And now, news from Singapore...” The radio hissed. “Our island garrison endured yet another night of indiscriminate bombing by the Japanese horde. But General Wavell has given his assurances that every able-bodied man and weapon is being used to frustrate the advance of enemy forces on the ground.” Pause. Another hiss. “Excuse me. Ladies and gentlemen: reports received just minutes ago, confirm that British and dominion troops are, as we speak, engaged in a fierce struggle to hold the town of Bukit Timah.”

“Turn that down, will you.” It was Elizabeth. She was leaning against the door, in her nightgown, hair in knots to her chest. She eyed Anna for several seconds until her face cracked to a smile. “Quite a catch, hey.”

Anna shrugged. Hoping it wasn’t obvious what she’d been thinking about since waking.

“Coy, are we?” Elizabeth said. “Can’t say I blame you.” The front of her nightgown had opened enough to see the better part of her breasts. She wrapped it closed. “I’d also keep him to myself. Just tell me there’re more where he came from.”

The BBC newsreader was droning on about the stalemate on the Eastern Front. Something about Soviet forces preparing for their Spring Counteroffensive against the Nazis.

Elizabeth swanned toward the table. “What’s troubling you, my dear?” She draped a hand over Anna’s shoulder. “Having an attack of conscience? All you did was kiss him for goodness’ sake. Hush now. It’s your second year in the city, big girl.”

Anna removed her friend’s fingers from her shoulder. “It’s not that,” she said. “I had a rough night, that’s all. Wait.” She held up her hand to cup her ear. “Listen.” The newsreader recounted the latest casualties of the battle for the seas. A Nazi wolf pack had sunk three American cargo ships in the Caribbean, bringing the total loss to over ten thousand tonnes for the month to date.

There was a rap on the door.

“You expecting someone?” said Elizabeth.

“What’s it to you if I am?”

“No need to get defensive, my dear.” Elizabeth studied the door, then looked back. “Oh, before I forget: a fellow popped around yesterday evening. One of your farming types. Brayed like a donkey.”

Anna ignored the next rap at the door. Wondered how Fanus had tracked her down. “Yes: and?”

"I offered him a drink. Poor chap looked parched...You don't mind do you?"

"Oh, no, I'm just surprised: he isn't normally given to small talk, that's all."

"You telling me," Elizabeth said. "Struggles a bit with the language, too, doesn't he?"

Anna laughed. "Not really. It's more because he doesn't normally speak English as a matter of principal. What did he want?"

"You, I'm guessing. No, seriously, he just downed the wine and then asked to use the telephone. Next thing, he gone."

Anna was about to ask something when the rapping started up again.

"I'll leave you to do the honours," Elizabeth said. She looked at her reflection in a saucepan, and tussled her hair at a knot. Then she looked at her slippers. "If its Anthony, won't you be a dear and tell him to wait outside. I'm in no state to take visitors." Then she thought of something, winked. "Who knows though: maybe it's your Prince Charming with a bunch of flowers."

Anna scowled, dismissed her with a wave. Before she got to the door, there was another knock, as if from a slight, yet determined hand. "Who is it?"

"Miss Anna, it's me. Kleinjan."

She opened the door on its latch. Recognised Kleinjan by the sound of his breathing. It was short and laboured. She peeked out. He stood with his hat in both hands. "Why so early?" she said. "Didn't I say 9:30?" She removed the chain, and opened the door. The daylight startled her and she had to squint until her eyes had adjusted.

As always when in the city, he was wearing his suit, but time his jacket lay over his shoulder and his tie was loose and far from vertical. The top two buttons of his shirt were unbuttoned and his chest had a sheen of sweat. Her first thought was the town drunk. But it wasn't possible: she'd never seen him touch alcohol: his abstinence was legendary. She took a step back. The sun was clear of the city skyline and already angry.

"Jong, what happened?"

"I walked."

"All the way from your cousin's? That's a mile or more."

"Ja, but it's nothing."

"Genade, didn't I tell you to bring the car? That was the whole point."

Kleinjan glanced over his shoulder. The traffic was almost bumper-to-bumper along Orange Street in the direction of the city centre. "The place you asked me to take you to, is just here alongside. It will be quicker to walk. In any case, a person can't leave a car alone on the streets of District Six."

Her shoulder muscles tensed. She'd planned the morning to the minute but now things were taking their own course now. To calm down, she focussed on her breathing.

Kleinjan peered past her through the crack in the door. "Can we speak inside?"

She hesitated, hand on the chain lock. "I called you here to drive me somewhere. A simple request, you would think. Then you arrive late and tell me you decided not to bring the car. And now...now

you tell me you want to come in and chat. We haven't got that sort of time, Kleinjan. Especially if we have to walk. Really, you can't do this to me."

He stood, wordless. A face that only a stone heart could shut the door on.

She knocked the chain off its latch and waved him in. "Five minutes." She glanced at the clock. "Magtig, we can't even afford that. But all right: sit anyway. Coffee?" Without waiting for Kleinjan to nod she lifted the pot off the stove and poured two cups. Then she sat on the opposite side of the table, blew foam to the rim of her mug and looked at him. "So, why did you do it?"

Kleinjan stirred two heaped spoons of sugar into his coffee, cradled his hands about his mug and watched the island of foam spiral. "What do you mean?"

"Come on." She leaned forward on her elbows. "There's no need to beat about the Blombos."

He inspected the coronation seal on the side of his mug.

"I can't believe I kept on trusting you," she continued. "Even after seeing for myself you were the very hands and feet of treachery. In our own back yard. It's unbelievable." She thumped her mug on the table and coffee pooled about its base. "You really had me there in Elim. I have to give it to you, it was clever. The church service to anaesthetise me; your cap in hand routine by the water wheel." She flicked the back of her index finger at the coffee and foam scudded across the table. "It makes me sick to think of it."

"Please." He looked up. There was no fear, no remorse, only sorrow. "That's not how it is."

"Ge. How is it then?"

He met her eyes without lifting his head. From the angle the whites were twice the area of his pupils. "I only told your father I was worried about you and Thomas. That you were getting too—"

"You told him what?" Anna felt like a train driver that had been hurtling along one track for days only to be flick-switched to the other without warning.

"No. No." He was swinging his head from side to side. "You're not understanding me. Baas Stefan caught me out. At Parliament, when I met him during the Monday session, at the gate. Normally he just hands me a package to deliver, or gives me some or other task. But this time...he just started questioning me. First this. Then that. About Thomas, then you. Haai, you know, when he gets going, there's no stopping him. I had to tell him something. Why not the truth?"

"But telling him I'm falling for that stranger? That's ridiculous." As she spoke Anna was thinking of the conversation with her father in the library, the one Margriet had cut short. It was no wonder he'd been suspicious. She felt pale.

Kleinjan stroked the salt and pepper stubble on his chin. "It's normal for a father, you know, to worry about his daughter." His smile was wry and deepened the folds of skin on his face. "A man's imagination can run away from him: we were all young once. In any case...He knows you go to dances, that type of thing."

"And?" she said. "What about it? I go to dances with lots of guys. That doesn't mean I'm in love with them."

He lifted his cup with both hands and sipped at his coffee. "That's right." His Adam's apple swallowed hard. "But just think: it would explain why you haven't been sleeping properly, not thinking straight..."

"Oh, come on. You're sounding just like him. That's just male prejudice, pure and simple. Men get just as silly as women when they're in love."

"I know, I know. But it worked Miss Anna, it worked. He told me it all made sense to him: you going off to Skulpiestrand, the arguments with the Prinsloos. So don't worry. It will be such a relief for him when he hears it's not true. He will forgive you everything." Kleinjan had lost some colour. "But me..." He swallowed again. "He'll kill me, I tell you. He still thinks I'm your chaperone, remember. He depends on me."

She put a hand on his. "I'm sorry I've given you such a hard time," she said. "It's just... there has been so much going on the past few days - so much deceit - that I don't know who I can trust."

He placed his hand on hers, squeezed lightly. "It will all come right." Then she remembered how the last conversation with her father had ended, and retracted her hand. "Still. He now knows that I know. What am I going to do? Just yesterday I told him to his face he'd placed us in danger by allowing Rietvlei to be used..." She racked her memory, relieved that nothing stirred. "No...that's all I said. Thank heavens. It could have been worse."

Kleinjan lifted his hat from the table and ran his forefinger around its perimeter, as if tracing his thoughts. When he looked up he was facing the clock. "We should be going," he said. "Your appointment was at 10, not so?"

"Oh yes." Her shoulders sagged. "Of course. Especially seeing we have to walk."

His gaze rested on her. "And now? What's wrong?"

She crossed her arms over her chest and rubbed her shoulders. "It's nothing."

"Come, now, Miss Anna. I know you too well."

Her eyes shifted toward the window. A breeze has sprung outside causing a palm frond to fan the lead-rimmed panes. For some reason it made her think of the bougainvillea scraping her childhood window. That incessant wind of the Strandveld: she'd never have thought growing up that she'd miss it. "It's...it's..." Then she shuddered. "Never mind...It's nothing you could help me with, anyway."

Kleinjan struggled to his feet. Standing, his head wasn't much higher than her line of sight seated. He edged around the table toward her. "Do you remember the time you came to our cottage? When you didn't know where else to go. When he..."

She realised her fingernails were digging into the back of her shoulders and forced herself to relax them.

He shuddered. "Jô. You must have been in Standard Four but it feels like the day before yesterday."

"No. Stop." Anna fought to keep the memory from surfacing but it was hopeless. She shivered. It had started without warning, a year after her mother's death. 'Shut up', was all he'd said at first. 'Enough of that bawling.' Her first reaction had been confusion. He himself had said it was normal to be sad. And, though he'd never admit it, he too had mourned. She'd seen him through the bedroom window

more than once, doubled over her mother's triptych crying, her favourite scarf crumpled to his chest.

"I'm sorry." Kleinjan was at her side, head cocked toward her. "I didn't meant to upset you. I just wanted to remind you how, back then, when you thought the choice you faced was too hard and there was nowhere else to turn...There's always hope, Miss Anna. Always."

"How is it...?" She faced him, battling back the tears. "That though we've hardly seen each other these past two years you can still read my thoughts?"

He shrugged. A pause. "Jô, but you're emotional today. It's got to do with your meeting this morning, isn't it? You don't want to go."

She shook her head, not trusting herself to speak.

"May I ask...?" He adjusted his tie to vertical but its tip was still two inches clear of his buckle. "Who is it you're going to see? I know people around here, you know. More than you think. Not just family and church. People who can get things done. Difficult things, if you know what I mean."

Anna hesitated. "Ag, it's nothing." She smiled as she absorbed what he'd said. It was a comfort to think that he'd be willing to help, even if she didn't choose to accept it. "It's just one of my professors. I...I need some advice."

By his expression she could tell he wasn't buying her story. "In the District?" He put his hat on his head. "Jislaaik...Now that's a strange place for a plaasmeisie like you to go to for advice." He studied her with his eyes. "Why couldn't you meet him at the university?" He turned toward the door. "Hiddingh is right across the road, isn't it?"

She shook her head. "I asked the same question. He said he wanted me to meet some particular people. 'From the other side of the political divide' was how he put it. I don't think he wants to be seen with them. Probably wouldn't be good for his career."

"I can see you're not telling me everything." He tipped his hat forward. "But, no, well...when you get like this I just..." He took his jacket from the back of the chair and folded it over his forearm. "Come. Let's go. It's at least a fifteen minute walk from here."

Chapter 15

Anna forged her way through the scramble of pedestrians up Orange Street and the gap between her and Kleinjan widened. The columns of the Mount Nelson Hotel's entrance had receded behind them and ahead was the rump of Devil's Peak. The extent of her haste was due less to her concern at being late than an unconscious effort to shake the weight of society's stares. And appease her state of mind. Since leaving the apartment she'd replayed the earlier phone conversation with Pickford-Dunn. She'd been careful to only give him the barest skeleton of her dilemma, talk in generalities. 'A matter of divided loyalty,' was how she'd put it. 'Just politics' But she should have known he'd read more into it, sense the tension in her voice. After all, it was his insightfulness that she admired most in him as a teacher.

A lick of wind warmed her face and the sun was high, and it felt good to be in the open again. As she approached the intersection with Buitenkant Street - the unofficial border of respectability that runs from the hem of Table Mountain to the foreshore - she slowed and looked back over her shoulder. Her breathing was short and laboured. "What's wrong, Kleinjan? You on some sort of go-slow?"

He stopped, wiped his brow with the back of his hand in a sliding salute. "Haai." He narrowed his eyes to the sun. "Have mercy. I'm not a young man anymore."

Anna's irritation subsided with her breathing. Looking at her one-time mentor, she felt a pang of guilt. Wondered what would become of him if she followed through with her intentions. Depending on how the dominoes fell, he could be end up a hero or a villain. More likely though, he'd be caught between stools. Funny: it always seemed to end that way for his volk: the dubious blessing of being neither too light nor too dark in a continent obsessed with contrasts. She kicked at a stone standing proud of the cobbles. It dislodged and careened into the ditch beside the road.

The plop into the stream jolted her. Stop. This wasn't the time to think about every repercussion, to indulge in guilt. It was more important by far, to focus on the Goliath of dilemmas still taunting her.

"We turn here," he said, pointing left down Buitenkant. "Go on ahead. I'll do my best."

Within a hundred yards the predictable Victorian manicure of Gardens had given way to edgier, more varied, texture. The road was cobbled but strewn with potholes. Here and there on the sidewalks there were piles of garbage. A couple of blocks further on, Kleinjan drew abreast.

"I can explain the way," he gasped. "Really. It's simple from here. Just—"

Anna stopped, hands on her hips. Opposite them stood a boy, barefoot with an arm wrapped about a street pole. A mongrel cringed at his side, its tail sweeping the ground. Then an elderly man dressed in suit pants and waistcoat walked past. When he noticed the strangers, he adjusted his fez and nodded a solemn greeting.

When he was out of earshot Anna turned to Kleinjan. "Am I crazy or what? Walking through District Six."

Kleinjan chuckled. "Just because there's coloureds, doesn't make it dangerous. Anyway, there's all types here. Blacks, whites, Jews even."

She looked down the sloped canyon of warehouse and shop fronts. It grew more crowded and disorderly with every block and at the end of it a sliver of the harbour was visible. She turned back a hundred and eighty degrees. The face of the mountain looked angry and more rock-jagged than

usual. To its right the top half of Lion's Head poked above a saw tooth of facades. "That's not what I meant, silly. You know me better than that." She made eye contact again. "Don't you? It's just...You read every day, things happening, bad people, skollies."

"Ag, that's just newspapers trying to sell. Sure there's gangsters. The Jesters, Killers. Jislaaik man, they can fight. Only with each other, mind you. Stay out of their way and they'll leave you alone."

"That may be so. Call me a coward if you like but I'm not going anywhere without you. Anyway, Papa would go mad if he heard you'd left me alone."

"That's no lie. Come."

Within moments they were in a side alley. At intervals above them, strings of washing spanned the gap between windows. The sceptical eyes of a woman watched from the shadow of a doorway as they passed. It felt like another world.

At the next street they turned left again and headed down the gentle gradient toward the bay. Two blocks later they came to a general dealer store. A clutter of goods were piled high enough on either side of the entrance to obscure the Coca-Cola signage on the wall. Sitting on a high-backed chair on the sidewalk was an old man in a jacket and tie reading *The Cape Times*. He seemed oblivious to the shoe shine crouched at his feet.

Anna skipped to catch Kleinjan. But her mind was two steps behind, trying to absorb the barrage of newness. It wasn't as though she'd ever consciously immunised herself from others. If anything, she'd gone out of her way to do the opposite. Her love of dancing, for example, had led her to the city's fringe. And she'd made a point of befriending the marginalised, even the so-called disreputable. But this was an altogether new experience, a parallel country, at once overwhelming in its strangeness and comforting in its ordinariness.

"What do you think?" Kleinjan said. "Nothing like the Overberg, is it?"

"I'll give you that." Anna laughed. They were at the intersection with Roeland Street, just down from a derelict building that had once served as the city's jail in the time of the Dutch. In the distance the ocean shimmered and a tug boat crept up on a British frigate. From below the entrails of Devil's Peak, a ramshackle of low buildings sprawled south toward Woodstock. The neighbourhood seemed to grow messier with every block, and pools of muck stagnated in the cobbled ditch beside them.

"Tell me: how much further to go?"

"We will be there just now," he said, stepping into the next street. "I promise."

Anna thought about the task at hand. It seemed, again, overwhelming. Would Pickford-Dunn be there to make introductions? He'd been evasive on the phone. And how much had he already told the others? She strode ahead, hoping to walk off her doubts. Soon they were on Canterbury Street, the next thoroughfare parallel to Buitenkant and heading toward the sea. The vista of the docklands came into focus as they descended the hill and then the minaret of a mosque solidified above the haze.

An urchin eyed them from the diagonally opposite street corner. His coat was unbuttoned to his ankles and he stood in the yoke of his barrow. "Aartappels," he cried, and dug his hands into a crate of vegetables. "En uie." Then he was in their faces, holding his wares up like an offering to the gods. "Tamaties ook."

Kleinjan pressed a coin into the boy's hand and dismissed him. Then he caught Anna's attention and pointed ahead. "There it is. Two blocks."

Anna waited at the edge of the kerb staring ahead. At the bottom of the hill the street ended in a T-junction. She recognised the cross road as Upper Darling Street by its breadth and choke of traffic; it was known as the artery that fed the heart of the District. Her lower back tensed. Something was bothering her.

On the far side of the street was the unmistakable lime cement and stone walls of the castle. The edifice was somehow more imposing from this aspect than it had appeared the day before when she'd teetered on the threshold. Even from a hundred yards she could feel the shudder of the Union Jack and the Orange, White and Blue of the Union as they fluttered above the ramparts. The ancient structure had become the locus of her predicament.

She bent over to relieve the pressure on her spine. The recurring horror was flickering in her mind again. Drowning sailors. This time they were chattering and adrift on an icy ocean, the evil cucumber of a U-boat slinking away beneath an oily sea. The image steeled her resolve. Surely it was better to sacrifice self than do nothing while her people suffered at the hands of a ruthless enemy. But inform on her father? It was an impossible choice. She realised then how naïve it was for her to be putting her hope in a middle-aged university professor she'd known for less than a year.

Kleinjan stood next to her. "Ag, Anna, I wish you'd tell me what's the matter."

"Oh...it's nothing..." Anna stepped off the kerb. "Nothing you can help with, anyway."

A bus with a pair of commuters hanging from its rear end sped past toward the Y-junction of Darling Street and Sir Lowry's, and melted into the traffic. The South Easter was angry now, and whipping up dust clouds from a plot of land opposite them.

"Come, one more block and we're there." Kleinjan's face betrayed a blend of disbelief and knowing. Without waiting, he shambled along the pavement to the next street corner.

She joined him, staring at the entrance to a triple-story building on the opposite side of the street. Its door and window frames were painted in blue pastels making it stand out in the otherwise run-down façade of the street. He pointed at the house with his head but averted his gaze as he spoke.

"You mean that's it," she said. "The Stakesby Lewis Hostel?"

"Is Miss Anna doubting me again?" His forehead wrinkles looked deeper than usual. He nodded at a woman with a head scarf walking past. Her face was a prune and implacable. "Ask anyone around here. Haai, you know that's where Tabata stays?"

Anna shifted on her feet. "Who's that?"

Kleinjan scanned the surroundings. The closest people on their side of the street were a pair of boys playing barefoot with a wire frame car in the gutter. He lowered his voice. "Your father would call him a communist."

Anna thought back to the conversation with Pickford-Dunn. He'd said his connections were 'of left-wing persuasion.' She'd assumed that meant he was liberal-minded. But the more she got to know him, the less certain she was of his political standpoint. On the one hand he was a man of the establishment: encouraging students to volunteer for the Union's intelligence services after graduation, as British as the King. But there was more to him: something edgy: he seemed to move with equal ease in the margins of Cape Town society.

Then she noticed four men in jackets and suit pants near the entrance to the hostel. Two stood facing the street; the others were seated on narrow wooden benches, hunched and facing each other over a game of drafts.

"Listen," she said, taking a step to cross the street. "Thank you for guiding me here. But this part I need to do alone."

Kleinjan started after her. "Now way, Miss Anna, I can't leave you like this. These are dangerous people."

She waited for a teenage boy in boxer shorts and a short-sleeve shirt to rattle past on a bicycle. "This isn't your battle, Kleinjan. Please. I've asked too much of you already. Just stay here, I won't be long."

The two men guarding the entrance didn't flinch from their stations as Anna approached. They were dressed in suits with shoes that reflected the afternoon sun's glow from the hostel walls. Though their eyes were barely visible below their hats there was no doubt they were watching. "I'm here to see Professor Pickford-Dunn," she said with a confidence she didn't feel.

The nearest guard eyed her for several moments and then raised a lazy hand to doff his sunglasses. He had a pencil moustache and his hair was shaved close at the sides. "Afternoon, ma'am." One of the drafts players lifted a disc and slapped it in an open space. The other banged the table. Neither acknowledged her. The guard pointed. "Up the stairs, left at the end of the passage."

"Hey, you." The other guard stuck a foot, barring the pavement. His socks were short and black and white striped. He stabbed a finger at Kleinjan's chest, and wore a half-cocked smile. "We only know about the lady."

Anna's hands were clenched in an effort to hide her fear. She thought about intervening. Goodness, she could do with Kleinjan's company. Then she looked up at the sun, guessed it to be well past ten. She remembered her professor's warning. He'd said his friends were 'impatient', 'shouldn't be presumed upon.' Anyway, there was nothing anyone could do to help her with what she had to do next. No, this was something she had to face alone.

Time slowed as she brushed past the guard. There were pockmarks in the plaster of the lintel above the door and the flecks of paint on the floor. Inside, the air was dank and smelled of stale beer. Instead of an entrance hall there was a short corridor that ended in a staircase. Under the first flight was a trapdoor and the space beneath was blocked by an assortment of boxes and an upturned table and chairs. Anna hesitated, thought of leaving, telling Pickford-Dunn she'd changed her mind. But she remembered her conundrum, hitched her dress, swallowed and started up the stairs.

The second story landing was dark except for the weak glow from an electric bulb dangling from the ceiling. As she tip-toed deeper into the passage the sounds of the street grew fainter and more muffled and the air was close and stale. It reminded her of her mother's closet: the one she'd inherited but left unused with all its clothing. Her father, without consulting her, had chopped it up for firewood during her first term at university. She'd never found out what happened to the clothes.

Anna stopped at the last door on the left, knocked three times, paused, and knocked again.

"Who's that?" It was a high-pitched voice but male.

Anna poked her head through the partly-opened door. Inside, three men slouched in easy chairs by the window, hogging the light. The room smelled of curry and beer and the sounds of the city drifted in through an open window. Outside, a hodgepodge of urban decay stretched toward the rock-strewn apron of Table Mountain. She thought of the view from her kitchen: oak branches and speckled sunlight, the pink walls of the Mount Nelson swayed by palm fronds and ivy. It was difficult to believe she was only a half hour away by foot.

"Aitsa, she's a looker, nè." It was a voice from behind the door, addressing his companions. He had a hat on which was odd considering the lack of direct sunlight in the room. Beneath it his ears were strong and pointed but not ungainly.

"Miss van der Vliet, I suppose." He flicked the under rim of his hat with his index finger. His face was younger than his years, moustached and his eyes almost shone. "You're a bit late, nè. But don't worry. We're just happy you decided to grace us with your presence, so to speak."

"Call me Anna. Please."

He patted his chest. "Mannie."

She stole a glance at the others seated beside him. "Where's the professor?"

"Nee wat: he didn't explain? Sorry's on me." He pointed at a chair. "Take a seat."

Anna didn't move.

"Pickford-Dunn apologises," Mannie continued. "He's a busy and important man nowadays." He glanced at his friend, smiled. "Plays both sides, you know." He winked. "It must be difficult. But don't worry: we'll get along just fine, you and I..." He half rose. "Please." He pointed at the chair again. "I insist."

Anna sat. The bottom of the chair seemed to give way and her lap sank below her knees. "All right," she said, sinking further. "I presume you're now going to tell me what we're doing here."

"Sharp attitude, hey," Mannie said to the others. The man directly opposite him fiddled with his cufflinks. The third stubbed his cigarette in a sawn-in-half Coke tin. "Actually..." Mannie upended a packet of Commodore cigarettes and tapped it on his armrest. A cigarette fell to the ground and he stooped to gather it. "It's more like what we can do for you."

Anna felt her chest constrict at the remnants or anticipation of cigarette smoke. Instinctively she looked at the window. She wanted nothing more than to get away but she was here now and determined to see it through.

"We understand you have a..." Mannie stuck a finger between his collar and his neck and ran it around to widen the gap. "What's the word you people use?" He clicked his finger in mock frustration. "A co-nun-drum. That's it." He glanced at the others. "Clever, nè."

"What did he say?" Anna tried to sit upright but after a few seconds she slumped. "Pickford-Dunn, I mean."

Mannie placed his hands together in front of his chest, fingers on fingers, like a tent. "Ag, ma'am: you must relax, really." He cupped a cigarette, lit it and inhaled as if his life depended on it. Then he let a stream of smoke escape from the side of his mouth. "Let's just say the professor and I go back a long way." He extended his arms to take in his colleagues. "What we talk about here stays here. You have my word."

She couldn't remember meeting an individual that looked less trustworthy and every instinct in her shouted a warning. But she'd thought through her options enough times in the past forty-eight hours to know there was nothing left for her but to trust the process. "Please," she said. "It's important. What exactly did he tell you?"

Mannie flicked the butt of his cigarette with the tip of his pinkie and ash drifted to the carpet. His eyes flickered from her left to her right side and then settled on his lap. "We know about the Germans."

Anna felt her chest tighten, like the room about her. Guessing that despite the bad light it must be obvious she was blushing. "But...but he promised..."

"Relax, ma'am, really. We come by our information any number of ways, mos." He coughed. "What's important is that if we know, it's only a matter of time before the police know the same."

"What else do you claim to know?"

Mannie hacked phlegm in his throat, looked from one colleague to the other and back to Anna. "Excuse us, ma'am, but is this any way to talk to friends? No, no." He stubbed his cigarette, shuffled in his seat as if to rise. "If you like, we can call it quits, right now. No hard feelings."

Anna felt a surge of panic. To face Kleinjan or, worse, her father, without a plan was unthinkable. Dammed if she did one thing, damned if she didn't. "No. Wait," she said. "Please. It's just..." She felt like crying and was angry with herself because of it. She looked out the window. In the distance a seagull was flapping its wings but making no progress into the wind. She daubed the corner of her right eye. "You don't understand how difficult this is."

Mannie settled back in his chair, placed a leg over his other knee. "Go on."

Anna swallowed. A shaft of sunlight had entered the window from one side and created a wall of gently swirling dust. She wished one last time she could think of another way, but couldn't, then said. "I saw them myself. Germans. On the farm. Taking the..." Her chest was closing in on her and she wondered where her next breath would come from. She made another effort to get up, this time managing to lift herself out of the dent in the chair by hoisting herself with both hands on the armrests.

Then she changed her mind, sank down again. The men kept staring at her, silent.

"All right," she said. "I guess I just have to trust you people. It was...it was only food: meat, vegetables. Goodness, it would be hard to prove they even came from the farm. Surely that's...that's not reason enough for a good man to die?"

"So..." Mannie tapped his index fingers together four times. "It's your father, isn't it? You think he's deep in the...how can I say it politely? Sorry, ma'am..." He glanced at the others, smiled. "Hy's diep in die kak."

Anna stood, dusting her dress. "Listen. Mannie. I'm not going to sit around here and let you insult me."

Mannie had fired another cigarette and eyed her through its smoke.

"You think this is amusing, don't you? You've no interest in helping me. Why...why, do you care about any of this, anyway? I bet all you want is...is...money. Tell me I'm wrong."

"Now, now, ma'am: slow down." He pointed his cigarette at his two colleagues in turn, then at her. "All of us here share something else, something much more important in common."

"*Have*," she said. "Have something in common." She had one hand on her hip. "That's how one says it. Either you *share* something or you *have it in common*. Not both. Listen..." She looked about the room, coughed. "I can't imagine what you people think you have in common with me."

"How about a po-li-ti-cal con-science." Mannie was gesticulating with both hands now. "Okay: let me say it really simply: we love our country, our people. And I don't mean just you fancy people, mos. No, I mean people like us too. Of colour."

Mannie's colleague opposite spoke for the first time. His face was darker than the other two and his voice was deep with the accent of the isiXhosa. "And that includes the workers who slave away on your mines, your factories of war."

She stared at him. "You're Mr. Tabata, aren't you?"

He laughed and fell silent.

"Even if he was, he wouldn't admit it," Mannie interrupted. "The real Tabata's a shadow. Now you see him, now you don't."

Anna kept staring at the man. There was something about his manner she found reassuring. A depth of character. It was time to throw caution to the wind. She said, "What if I told you I agreed with you? The workers, I mean. That it's not right how the government treats them. That I did care. Hypothetically, anyway."

Mannie chuckled. "Hy-po-the-ti-cally." He looked at his colleagues. "We're simple people here, ma'am. Salt of the earth, you know. Let's talk sommer or-di-nary English. All right?"

"Gentlemen...please...I don't disagree with your motives. Pickford-Dunn told me all about your organisation. Your trade union roots. Even your aims. And it doesn't concern me. Honestly. I wouldn't be here otherwise."

"Good, good." Mannie sat back again. "So...My friends and I, we think there is a way out of your dilemma. A way with dignity. Where both sides win, mos." Outside a car horn blew and someone shouted. "What I mean is: you can do your duty to your country and your father also lives."

Anna couldn't find words. She tried to beat down a surge of hope. Swallowed.

"Right, right. I can see this is difficult for the lady." Mannie shifted a cushion behind his back. "Let's stop beating about the bush. If you don't tell the police about the skelm business going on at your farm and they find out – and trust me ma'am, they always do – you're both in the tronk. If you're that lucky." His eyes ogled her breasts for a second, shifted to her face. "You're over 18, right so?"

She crossed her arms. "With respect, Mr...Mannie. You said you wanted to help. So far I've only heard problems. And now you're trying to insinuate..."

Mannie flicked ash onto the floor. "We know about you and the German."

Anna felt the room contract further, like her lungs. "What are you talking about?"

He reached down for an envelope at the foot of his chair. He slipped three photographs out and held the first up. It was a photograph of Anna and Thomas locked in the Tango. He passed it to her.

Anna ran her fingernail over the sepia. She may have been imagining it but the paper still felt warm. The image was as real as the excitement she'd felt when they'd embraced. His face was visible from the side, like a bust of a Nordic god, and he was whispering in her ear. Words that still ricocheted through her waking and sleeping. Thoughts of love and the future, the futility of war.

"You..." She waved the photo at Mannie. "You..." Then she glared at his friends and back at him. "You perverts."

"Easy ma'am. Just think what your father would say if he saw this business of yours. Or the defence force. I'm sorry: there's nothing anyone can do to help a person caught with the enemy in such a – how can I say? – in-ti-mate pose."

Anna rose on the balls of her feet, inhaled until her chest was full to bursting. "That's...that's blackmail." she said. "I thought I was supposed to trust you."

"Come now," Mannie said. He reached down, gathered the photographs and slipped them into the envelope. "We just needed you to pay attention. Please. Sit."

Anna felt angry, more with herself than anyone. "Thank you for your time, gentlemen." She made to turn. "I knew I should never have trusted a bunch of communists."

"Hey," he said. "Easy. All my friends want is a free and equitable—"

"Since when do you care about what's free?" She felt momentarily elated at being on the offensive. "Just look at Stalin. Are you people blind or something. He was in bed with Hitler. Until the devil turned on him. No, you're dictators pure and simple. The lot of you."

Mannie rose, held out his palm as if in surrender. "This didn't have to get personal, ma'am. But your father... How is he different? Sticking those laws through Parliament trying to ban workers from striking. But all right. My contacts tell me it's not going to happen, not this year at least. Thank goodness, is what I say."

"I'm not my father," Anna said, arching her spine.

"Yes, yes. Of course." Mannie said. "That's why we agreed to talk to you, mos."

"What I still don't understand though," Anna said, "Is: aren't you people supposed to be an underground organisation? Why are you so happy to talk to someone like me?"

"Hah. No flies on the lady," Mannie said. "All right. Let me tell this straight: we think you should tell the authorities. You know: what's going on at the farm."

"And see my father tried as a traitor? There's a death penalty in this country, last time I checked. Tell them yourself."

"We've tried. Through in-ter-me-diaries, of course."

"Then what are we doing here?"

"This government wouldn't listen, mos. Like I said before. They don't see us black people as humans even, what they going to believe us. They right away think we're just making nonsense again, trying to make kak, soos hulle sê. That's why we need you."

Anna thought about it for a moment. Something wasn't adding up. "But surely there must be someone else you could get to help you," she said. "I'm not the only white person in this country."

Mannie ground his cigarette into the armrest and tossed it out the window. He signed, shook his head. "You'd be shocked, I tell you, if you knew how few white people would be prepared to tell on one of their own people. Maybe an English liberal, who knows. But your father's a famous man. A conservative. No one's going to believe an Englishman who calls him a traitor." He arched his back, as if stretching. "But then again...If his own daughter..."

"Wait a minute," she said. "You said earlier you had way out of my – as you put it – dilemma: that spared us."

"Yes, yes. Easy. I was getting to that. See, you'll be clear as a whistle. You were in Cape Town mos, the whole time, while this thing was going on." He paused, raised his eyebrows. "Right. Thought so. And listen, no-one's going to blame you for taking a few days to report the story. I mean, who wouldn't agree it's a moerse thing for a young lady to have to do."

"And Papa? There's no way I'm going to save my skin if it means..."

"Hey. What did I say? Relax, man. We have some clever lawyers in our organisation, some of the best - Jewish. They say there's ex-ten-u-a-ting circumstances. That they'll get him off on account of him being, soos hulle sê, coerced."

"What? No-one ever forced my father to do anything."

"Sorry, ma'am. I'm not at liberty to go into detail. You're just are going to have to trust us. As I see it, you don't have a choice."

Anna felt as though her legs were about to give way, from anger as much as exhaustion. But it wasn't the time to give in. "So you're asking me to betray my own father to further your nefarious purposes?"

"Nefarious? Jislaaik, that's a big word."

"It means evil."

"Against the law." Mannie drew on his cigarette and let smoke trickle from the side of his mouth. "That's what the word meant originally."

Anna stared. Nothing about this Mannie character was as it first seemed. Beneath the coarse mannerisms and the use of vernacular, there was a depth to him. He was clearly an educated man.

"You look confused, ma'am," he continued. "Listen here, what we're asking isn't as difficult as you fear. Think about it: your father's going to get found out sooner or later. By jumping the gun you'll actually be saving him. Don't worry, we'll get him off, believe me. Our lawyer. Man, he's mos sharp as a razor. Anyway..." He scratched behind his ear. "We know you've been...how does a man say it...? About to tell on him yourself. I'm right, hey?"

Anna stared at him, running circles in her mind. The walk to the castle from Parliament. Fruit-sellers on the Parade. She tried to remember faces. She felt compromised, dirty, like a pawn in a chess game. She said, "Go to hell."

The wind whistled around the windowsill and a car hooted far off. Mannie's face hardened. He sat back. "Sorry to be blunt," he said. "But if you don't do it...hell's where you're both going."

In her heart Anna wanted to run, make as much distance on the awful trio in front of her. But her mind intervened. She stepped toward the door. "There is a lot to consider," she said. "I'll need to get back to you."

Mannie stood, stepped toward her to close the space between them. He was short, taking Anna to the neck. But his presence had a pent up energy. "Wait, wait," he said. "We need to know today."

She was thinking but not fast enough. "And if I can't?"

Mannie glanced down at the envelope. "Sorry, ma'am. Workers' lives are at risk. Millions: on the Russian Front, all over the world."

"Russians? Ge. You're not doing all this just to help that lot are you?"

He shifted his eyes to his colleagues. "I told you she was sharp, hey." Turning back to her, he said. "On the money, ma'am." He grimaced. "You see me and my friends...we've been trying to talk to old man Smuts for years now – about our rights. He listens of course. A real gentleman he is. But nothing ever happens. He's just going to keep kicking the can along the road, I tell you, unless we have something to...to bargain with."

She shook her head. "Typical."

"Hey, what's that supposed to mean?"

"You're going to blackmail him, aren't you?"

Mannie coughed. "Negotiate, is how we say it. And at least we're doing something for our country. Not like your father, entertaining those Fascists in his dining room. Or you..." He coughed. "Doing it with that Nazi."

She felt herself reeling but held her ground. The two horns of her dilemma had just become four. Denial and distance - she'd learned from her father – were safest harbours for the floundering. She said, "That bastard tried to take advantage of me. Just because I'm naïve enough to believe his sob story, he thinks he can dance his way into my bed."

"Hey," Mannie said. "Enough of that act. We know you love him. You're a woman, mos. You can't help it. Come on, at least think about our proposal. Just be the go-between. We're not asking more than you were going to do yourself."

"Give me a day," she said. "About telling on my father. But as for the Nazi..." She took another step toward the door, opened it. "Let him hang."

Chapter 16

Anna strode several steps ahead of Kleinjan in a silence made stronger by the absence of traffic. They'd just left Glynn Street after crossing Hope, and were now on the aptly named Wandel Road, a narrow winding lane. The industrial grime of the upper district had given way to a gentler residential shabbiness. Here and there were jacaranda trees, drooping blue blossoms, a vine jutting out of a break in a wall, a backyard oak with a tree house. Though now dreading the lunch date with her father, she was determined not to be late and had insisted on taking the shorter but convoluted back roads through Gardens to save time.

Hatfield Street came to an abrupt end opposite Cape Town High School and they swung left toward the mountain. Orange Street was only a hundred yards or so ahead, and, seeing the familiar pineapple sprouts of the Nelson's palms, her spirits lifted.

"Thank you so much," she said when Kleinjan caught up. "I'll be all right from here." She pointed right. "I'm meeting Papa in the Gardens. I know the way from here. It joins up with Government Avenue. Just five minutes or so."

She wandered, thankful for the shade of the oaks, and the time. She needed to be alone and ponder what had been asked of her, what she'd asked of herself. But in spite of the enormity of what was at stake, she felt strangely lighter. The angst she'd been burdened with had lifted. She was decided.

When she arrived at the clearing he was standing at the edge of the well. Both hands were palm up in front of him and a pigeon was perched on them shovelling seed to its beak. When he saw her approach he shooed the bird off, then shook his hands as if of dirt.

She hurried to him, flung her arms about her neck. "You're early again," she laughed. "Some things never change." She pecked him on the cheek. "It's a comfort."

"Ja," he laughed. Then he glanced at her breasts and back to her face. "But you're late. Again." He reached for his fob watch. "5 past 1. Where've you been?"

"Ag, nowhere really. You know how I like to walk the city."

He was about to say something but checked himself. "Well." He patted his stomach. "I don't know about you, but I'm starved."

She pouted, then elbowed him, "So how do I know you aren't going to have to run off on some affair of state?"

He laughed. "Listen, my lief. I'm sorry about yesterday. Really. Nothing is more important to me than our time together."

She locked her arm in his, and led him into the shadows of the path. "How did it go, the session?"

"Ag." He shook his head. "If it wasn't bad enough fighting the Sappe, we've got our own Young Turks trying to hijack the agenda."

"Are they still planning a walk-out?"

He nodded, pinching his nose. "Ja, can you believe it? You know, this isn't the time for games. We've got to show a united front. Stay focussed on the big issues."

She swung their arms as they walked. "And what may those be?"

"Ja-nee." He lifted his chin and surveyed the geometric patterns of the rose garden ahead. "All the things you give me a hard time about. Group areas. Mixed Marriages."

She stiffened, shifted from contact. Their pace had slowed.

"My child," he said. "Do yourself a favour: take a drive through District Six. You'll see the...onsedelikheid that results when you let nature take its course. Happening in broad daylight for Heaven's sake. It's like they're showing off. Skande."

At the mention of District Six, Anna didn't know how she could control herself so she let go of his hand. Did he know, already? No. She relaxed. Surely it wasn't possible?

Soon they were approaching the menagerie. The tops of the cages were visible through the branches. There was a flutter and squawking and then silence. "Before we get to the restaurant," she said, "I've got to ask you again: what we started talking about yesterday."

He lengthened his stride.

"All right," she said, skipping to catch up. "I can see I'm going to have to spell it out." When she drew level she touched him on the forearm. "Did you really think I wouldn't put two and two together? I mean, of course I knew something was wrong, Papa. From Thursday night already, in the sitkamer. For a start, their German wasn't anything like that of the South Westers."

Her father ran the tip of his tongue across his upper lip and withdrew it. "What are you talking about?"

"I know where your sympathies lie," she continued. "Your views on our role in the war effort is hardly a secret. And don't mistake me. It's understandable. Especially for us Afrikaners. Hundreds of thousands think the same way. Not that I agree with them, of course. But Papa, to actually help the Germans...Why on earth?"

"It's not what you think..."

"Well, what is it then?" She brushed a leaf off her shoulder, looked him in the eye. "I presume you know how serious it is if we're found to be aiding the enemy?"

He scanned the shrubbery. Satisfied, he turned back to confront her. He lifted his index finger and wagged it at her. "Don't you lecture me on what I should and shouldn't do. I've got a lot more life under the belt than you do." He used his finger nail to scratch at a pockmark on his . "You know what it means if Germany loses, don't you?"

Anna took hold of a paling. Though she'd known in an intellectual sense for days, nothing could prepare her for hearing from her father's own lips that he was a traitor.

"No?" His voice rose like a baritone at the end of an aria. "Thought not. Let me tell you then. This is what happens: Britain wins." He turned around to check if anyone was approaching along the path, and swung back. "So what's so bad about that, you ask? Mama was English. They're nice to the Jews. Fair enough: I don't like the stories I read about what the SS are up to any more than you do - even if they're half true. But think of the alternative. If Britain wins the war, so does Russia." He fastened the centre button of his jacket. "Have you stopped to consider what the communists will do when they take over this country? Think about it. Our civilisation. The church."

Anna felt her spirits plunge. Her religion. It was the trump card he pulled whenever his arguments were faltering.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” he continued. “You think the King won’t allow it? Let me tell you something. Even if the allies win this war, Britain will be bankrupt. Her colonies will be pawns in a global chess game. Trust me. I’ve seen it at Versailles. No: South Africa will need real friends if we are to have any hope of restoring the republic.”

For a moment Anna felt helpless to counter the force of his argument. It wasn’t by accident that he’d risen from local party organiser for Barry Hertzog’s Nationalists to United Party Member of Parliament for Bredasdorp and a key figure in the caucus of the Purified Nationalists. But she had his blood. She wasn’t going to stand still and be lectured. She said, “All that is beside the point. What really matters is that this country carries the death penalty for treason.”

For once he looked uncertain. Or was it fear? “What exactly did Kleinjan tell you?” he said. “That little...” His head seemed to swell and he reddened. “You know what a vivid imagination the volk have.”

“Nobody told me anything.” Anna was amazed at how easily the second untruth followed the first. A white lie, she consoled herself. The lesser of two evils. “I saw it myself.”

They’d turned onto a side path, crossed over a sloop, and reached the intersection with Government Avenue again. Her father stumbled on a root, and turned to face her. “You saw what?”

“The boats.”

“What boats, where?”

“Skulpiestrand,” she said. “You didn’t think I’d forget about the footprints in the sand, did you?”

“But Kleinjan—” He stopped himself. “I thought all that was just your imagination. That you weren’t feeling well. All the stress of exams and stuff.”

“I saw the loading myself.”

“Jinne.” His jowels wobbled as he shook his head. “You mean at night? You’ve always been adventurous, but...” They’d come up against a construction sign. What until recently had been a stately oak-lined walkway, inclining toward the mountain, was now a trench flanked at twenty yard intervals with piles of ground. “Nee, wat,” he said. “What is this?”

“Air raid shelters,” she said. “Surely you must have heard about the project. Was all over the newspapers a few months ago.”

“Oh, ja. I remember now. But think about it. Are these trenches really going to make a difference if a Stuka dive-bombs this city? Please.”

“Well,” she said. “At least they’re trying to give the common people somewhere to hide when you parliamentarians scurry down into your bunkers.”

They crossed back over the sloop. It was a torrent. “What do you know about bunkers?” he said.

“Just that Parliament’s basement is riddled with them. It’s an open secret. At university, anyway. What’s wrong? You look surprised? The powers that be always underestimate the intelligence of the governed.”

A squirrel blocked their path. It held an acorn to its chest, glaring at them through the bulges of its eyes. Her father stamped his foot and watched the squirrel scamper up the oak.

“Ag, foeitog,” she said, hands on her hips. “Why do you do that? The poor little thing didn’t do you any harm.” She kept her eyes on him, said, “I can’t go with this until you tell me the truth—what’s really going on? And more importantly, why? I’m your daughter. You owe me that at least.”

His pupils widened. For a moment it looked like he was about to answer. Then something changed. He pulled out his watch. “Come. We’ve only got forty minutes for lunch.”

Chapter 17

After their detour they turned back, passing the statue of Cecil John Rhodes. The imperialist had a hat in one hand, and pointed north with the other with an inscription of 'Your Hinterland Lies There.' A seagull was defecating on his shoulder and a turquoise tear streaked the bronze of his face. Anna was considering her options. After successfully prising a crack in her father's defences he'd slammed them shut again. Had she missed her opportunity to level with him? She kept silent as they walked on, and waited.

He slowed as they passed the bust, turned and peered into the great imperialist's face, as if trying to fathom Rhodes' expression. After a few seconds he broke off, and looked at her. "Yes," he said. "I won't deny it."

She waited, not daring to move or interrupt.

"We gave them meat, vegetables, some fruit. The Germans I mean. Not all of it from our farm, mind. You'll be surprised at how many other farmers in the Overberg are rooting for the Axis. The rumours are only half of it, trust me. Some are even spying for them." He straightened his tie. "But we only gave food. And some diesel. You must believe me, Engel. I didn't want to. I just had..."

"No choice?" Anna hitched her dress. She was tired of people making excuses. "You were going to say that, weren't you? I thought so. Goodness, we live in a democracy don't we? At least for the time being we do." She winced at the unintended irony of her words. "At least respect me enough to be honest with me. You wanted to help them. Sies, man. You're no better than a Nazi."

"Hemel," he muttered. The lines about his mouth looked as severe as dongas in the Karoo. Like it had been an ice age since he'd laughed. "That's quite an accusation. I suggest you take a deep breath and think carefully before insulting your own father like that."

She had a stab of doubt. How did he always manage to turn her anger back at her in a projection of guilt? "I'm sorry," she said without thinking. Almost angry with herself before finishing her next sentence. "But what else am I supposed to think?"

He sighed. A boy ran up from behind and bumped him on the elbow. He swung around, making a hand as if to slap. When he saw it was a youngster he relented, turned back to Anna. He fiddled a hand in his pocket. "All right. I didn't want to have to...How can I say this without it sounding wrong?" He squinted up at the sun and back. "They have my foster sister."

Anna was confused for a moment. What did some distant relative have to do with anything?
"Greta?"

He nodded.

"Well: what about her?"

"Like I say, they've taken her. Against her will."

She stepped closer. "What exactly are you saying?"

"They've got her, Anna. Kidnapped."

Anna looked about. Apart from a group of school children approaching from the direction of the rose garden, there was no-one about. She shook her head from side to side several times. "I don't—"

"Sorry," he said. "German Intelligence. They called her in one day, supposedly just to ask a few questions about something or other. And then it just went downhill from there. Now they're calling her a spy. Threatening to hand her over to the Gestapo."

"Greta? A spy?" Anna muttered. "But that's crazy. She's more German than Goethe. If I'm thinking of the same person you used to tell me about, she'd hardly be suspected to be a—how should I say?—liberal."

"That's just it," he said. "It doesn't make any sense. But they claim to have intercepted letters to prove it. Showing how she's been passing information to the Allies. Through me, can you believe? It's complete nonsense of course."

Anna was struggling to absorb the latest twist in a day strewn with tangles. Her voice paused to catch up with her mind. She felt a sudden weight of guilt at the thought that just an hour ago she'd almost been persuaded to sacrifice her own father. Thought him to be a wilful traitor. She felt an urgent need to sit down. Then she caught the first whiff of the restaurant. Toast and burned meat. Seldom had she felt as hungry. "But how?" she said, trying to steady her emotions. "You said yourself, you haven't had contact for years."

"It's not that hard, you know. The Abwher keeps a file on every person of German extract in South Africa. And the world for that matter."

"All right..." Anna's thoughts were drawing level with her lips again. "So they blackmail you into making Rietvlei a victualing station for their ships rounding the Cape. Clever. Like the Dutch East India Company three centuries ago. And what do you do?" The implausibility of it all starting to dawn on her. Perhaps he'd been forewarned and had just made up of this story of Greta as a ruse to placate her. She wouldn't put it past him. "So you just...sign on the dotted line. Choose your one-time sister over true family?"

"It's not like that. You must believe me. All they asked of me was to turn a blind eye for four months. They promised to be done by the end of February."

Anna looked to the sky. A plate of high Sirius was advancing from south to north. She was appealing to a higher power, her silent anchor in an ocean of change. "And what about Thomas and that other creep?" She tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. "Another thirty pieces of silver to entertain German officers in our home?"

"Wragtag. You really do think the worst of me."

"That's not fair. You have no idea how much I want to wake up and realise these last four days were nothing but a nightmare. That things are as they used to be at Rietvlei." She sighed. "Just you and me. None of this frightful war. The deceit, the killing. Just tell me I'm wrong. Please. And about Thomas."

"It was never supposed to happen," he said. "The agent assured me there'd be no direct contact. That both ratings and officers were forbidden to come ashore in Allied territory. Admiral Dönitz standing orders for heaven's sake. They're anyway building a submarine base in Madagascar. This was just a temporary measure."

"That's not what it looked like to me on Thursday," she said. "They were very much at home."

Her father's shoulders sagged. He shook his head. They were passing a vegetable garden. Waist high tomato plants swayed above a bed of lettuce. "Thomas surprised me. Just showed up at the front

door. Night before you arrived. God's own truth. Said his U-boat needed emergency repairs. A fuse box and cylinder re-bore. That's the only reason I agreed to bring him to Cape Town. He was supposed to just need a day or so to find a machine shop and he'd be gone. He promised to keep me informed." He shook his head once and stopped. "He can be persuasive, hey." His eyebrow hooped. "But I guess you know that."

Anna ignored his jibe. She wasn't going to be so easily drawn. "You could have refused," she said. "Thought of us. The risks."

"Ja." He looked at the toe cap of his shoes. They were shiny enough to make out his features in the reflection, and the leather soles crunched on the gravel. "I know. But...You've met him." Both eyebrows this time, and a reflux. "He's a hard man to refuse. And when he mentioned that his grandfather knew my foster father...."

Anna felt a tingle of shame. Perhaps she'd been too quick to judge. She was about to apologise when she remembered something. A slip of paper in the sitkamer: one moment it had been on the coffee table, the next it was gone. Seal of his sympathies. She was angry again. At herself for not seeing the double-cross. "And you expect me to believe this business about Greta?" she said. "Just like that. I know how you can spin a story for a penny, Papa, I've seen you doing it to the press. Why do you keep taking me for a fool?"

He gave his I-am-hurt look, drooped his head a degree or three. "My own daughter calls me a liar?"

She'd had enough now, decided to cut through the fat to the meat. "Why didn't you tell me you were Ossewa Brandwag," she said. "All this time you've been pretending you're a democrat. Non-violent protest. The primacy of Parliament. Isn't that what you drilled into me?"

His head lifts, his eyes larger even than normal. "What are you talking about?"

"I saw it myself," she said. "In the sitkamer Thursday night. The papers. You're one of them. You..."

"No. No." He kicked at the ground. A clump of clay disintegrated at his toe. "You've got it all wrong. That was another letter from Koos Prinsloo. He's been threatening to cut our party funding if I don't join. Ask him yourself if you like."

Anna bent to pick up a clod and hurled it at the trunk of an oak. Sand and mud splattered against the bark. "So why didn't you. Join I mean." She wiped her hand on her skirt. "You have the same aims."

"Come," he waved at her, "Let's keep going." He lifted a low branch from the path and let her under. "I'll explain on the way."

When they got to the menagerie he stopped, poked a stick through the grating of the cage and allowed a budgie to peck at it. "The party has forbidden any of his senior colleagues to join the OB," he said. "Sure, we've been staunch allies. That's no secret. But you must have read about the broedertwis. They're at each other's' throats. Daniel doesn't trust van Rensburg anymore. Thinks he's unstable, a danger to the cause. He's convinced our best chance of achieving the republic is through the democratic process. And..." He withdrew the stick causing the budgie to squawk and flutter at the grating. "You know I've always agreed."

Anna felt light-headed. It was too much information to weigh on an empty stomach. But she had to finish her questioning before he closed up again. "What about the other German?"

The tea room was in sight now. French doors flung open to the kitchen, tables and chairs dotting the shade. Her father said, "What's that?"

"Thomas' colleague. At home. The first night."

A waitress lounged on the patio in a pool of sunlight, not seeing. The proprietor sidled up, offering an unctuous smile. He picked a pair of menus from a pile, and held one out.

Her father took the menu. "You mean Kurt?" He ran his finger down the price list, muttered a complaint about inflation. "No idea. That was the last I saw of him. Thomas just said he had business in Cape Town."

Anna stroked a patch of gooseflesh on her forearm. "There's something not right about him."

The proprietor was in her father's face now. He had a bowtie and dinner jacket which looked incongruous with the cheap wood veneer décor of the restaurant.

"Before we sit down," her father said as they followed the proprietor to a table. "Can I ask you one favour?" He drew a chair out for Anna, didn't wait for a reply. "Let's forget this dreadful business. Just for the next half hour so we can enjoy a nice meal together."

She smiled. How could she change within seconds from wanting to throttle him to sense of adoration? "Oh, whatever."

"Donderse ding." Her father said, rocking the table back and forth. He pulled one leg out from under it to have a closer look. "Can't they make anything right these days?" He folded his serviette, ducked down and wedged it between the nearest paw and the paving below. "That's better."

"Papa, I think you'd better leave that. There's a man here to see you."

"Bliksem." Her father bumped his head on the underside of the table. "What now?"

"Meneer van der Vliet?" The stranger was thirty-something and wore a grandfather vest under his white, short-sleeve shirt. He had a paintbrush moustache, and his lips barely moved as he spoke. He waited for her father to get to his feet, then offered a handshake. "Speurder-Sersant de Villiers. South African Police."

"Ja," her father said, "How can I help?"

"Would you mind if I joined the two of you?" He pulled out a chair anyway. "I have just have one or two questions. Won't be five minutes, promise."

Anna's father inflated, eyebrows converging. Then he retracted the chair. "Listen here, Sersant...What's it again? De Wit..."

"De Villiers," he said. "Speurder-Sersant de Villiers. "Please sir. I'm here under direct orders. Kolonel Wessels, Pretoria." He glanced at Anna, nodded a greeting and pulled out the chair again.

"With respect Sersant...de Villiers: my daughter and I have lunch on average thee times a year and I'll be dammed if I'll share that pleasure with the likes of you."

De Villiers sat down, picked up a menu and studied it. Then, by way of lifting his eyelids he made eye contact. "I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I'm only doing my job."

Her father inhaled. "I understand your predicament, boy," he said. "But it's not my problem." As if by afterthought he drew a card from a silver holder. "If you have to, make an appointment with my secretary." He shoved the card across the table. Then he got up, helped Anna from her seat. "Now if you'll excuse us, we'll be taking a walk."

De Villiers eased himself further into the chair causing his stomach to fold over the edge of the table. "Just one moment, sir." He pulled a piece of paper from his top pocket. "Have a look at this. Please." He spread it on the table mat and jabbed a finger at a five-cornered emblem. "That's the castle in case you were wondering. A watercolour of the Officer Commanding, Seaward Defence Force, to be precise."

"Ja. And?"

De Villiers jabbed at the letter. "I am vested with the full authority of the state, both civilian and military, to take whatever measures I deem necessary." His lips made an effort to curl into a smile. "We like to run things by the book. Where we can."

Anna's father waved to catch the waitress' attention. When, on the third attempt, she looked his way, he held up the menu to her. Then he pulled out his watch, flicked it open and laid it on the table between them. "Reg so. Mr—sorry—Sersant. I'll give you four minutes tops."

The detective ogled the waitress as she felt for a pen in her top pocket. "Sir, you must understand. I don't necessarily agree with any of this, but I'm under strict orders to investigate."

"Ja, ja." Her father turned to the waitress, pointed at Anna then himself. "Only the two of us will be eating. Anna?"

Once they'd placed their orders, he turned to the detective. "Get on with it, boy."

"Thank you, sir." De Villiers coughed into his hands. "There have been complaints lodged against you. People from your constituency." His eyes rested on Anna too long for comfort, then back to her father.

"People are complaining all the time. Goes with the job."

"Understood. But these are...different."

Her father was about to say something but didn't.

"They say you're doing more than sheep farming at Rietvlei."

It was a subtle reflex, but Anna noticed it: her father sucking air. "Oh?" he said. "Interesting. Tell me more."

"Our sources say import-export."

"Ah. Is this the sort of brilliance you're paid for, Sersant – what was it again?"

"Speurder-Sersant. De Villiers."

"Ja-nee. Fine name. Huguenot stock. I've got some of that blood myself. Sersant de Villiers, have you ever heard of a farm over 100 morgen that doesn't sell some of its produce to foreign markets?"

The detective pulled out a packet of cigarettes, Springbok cigarettes, offered one to the others and helped himself. Then he struck a match on the side of the chair, and cupped the flame over the cigarette end. When tendrils of smoke appeared from the sides of his mouth he turned and blew a ring over his shoulder. It rose like a ghost until a breath of wind scuppered it. "It's my duty to tell you, Meneer van der Vliet." He narrowed his eyes to the remains of the smoke. "That it's a criminal offense to circumvent the regulations of the Agricultural Control Board."

Her father took the handkerchief from his pocket. "If you're accusing me of something," he said, rubbing a smudge from the cover of his watch. "I suggest you get to the point. You've got two minutes."

De Villiers used his thumb and second finger to topple ash over the edge of the table. He glanced at Anna, lingered, and returned his attention to her father. "Our sources tell us you're supplying the Germans."

"Wragtag. And you'd believe idle gossip over the word of a Member of Parliament?"

The waitress appeared from nowhere and placed a cluster of condiments on the table, set two places and scurried off.

"Gossips," de Villiers said. "And I didn't say I believe them." He drew on his cigarette until the end glowed. Then he blew smoke from the side of his mouth. Then he stubbed at the letter in front of him. "But someone does."

"Rubbish, Mr De... What the hell... You know as well as I do, this has got nothing to do with facts and everything with politics. You're here because I'm a thorn in the side of your masters. Simple."

"For all I know you may be right, Mr. van der Vliet." He snuffed the cigarette on the side plate. "Did you know I'm a big admirer of yours, the party?"

"It won't help to flatter me, Sersant. I wasn't born yesterday."

"I mean it," he said. "But that's not why I'm here. Just be so kind as to answer a couple of questions. You never have to see me again."

There was silence except for the chattering of other patrons.

The detective shoved the plate to one side. "Is it true there's a store full of fresh meat and vegetables on your farm? Enough to feed hundreds. Is that normal, Mr. van der Vliet, for a family of three?"

Her father checked his watch, stood. "Time's up," he said. "And I'll be damned if I'll do your job for you, mamparra. Rietvlei's only a day's drive. Go see for yourself."

"Our men already did, sir."

Anna exhaled. Throughout the exchange she'd found herself wanting to say something in support of her father, anything. Now she was glad she hadn't.

"Well then." Her father said, lifting his jacket off the seat back. "Then you've got nothing and you know it." He turned to Anna. "Let's go," he said. "This idiot is wasting our time." He turned back to the detective. "Oh. And I'm going to speak to the Minister of Police. In fact I'm meeting with him tomorrow. My boy, if you show up again without an appointment, you'll have more than your job to lose. I'll make damn sure you're unemployable."

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to offend." He rolled his khaki sleeve even higher up his arm. "You must understand: I'm only doing what I'm told."

Her father pushed the ashtray toward the detective. "Vieslik. These people who smoke during the day." He stared at de Villiers. "So, who's doing the telling?"

"I'm afraid I'm not free to discuss that, sir. But I tell you what..." He pulled a pack of business cards from his top pocket and handed one to Anna and her father. "My office number's there. If you have any information that you think might help us, I'd be much obliged."

De Villiers let his cigarette rest on the edge of the ash tray. There was an awkward silence as the smoke curled up and past his right ear. "Well, then," he said. "I'll be going. " As if remembering something, he looked at Anna, said, "One thing, Miss. He reached into his pocket again, produced a card and slid it across the table. "Is this perhaps yours?"

Anna felt for her hand bag which swung under her armpit, instinctively rummaged. The student ID: it wasn't there. Fear gripped her stomach and drew her to the ground. She remembered the sneeze on the moat the previous day, her undue haste. "Thank you," she muttered, and slid it into her bag.

De Villiers waited for her to make eye contact. "Is everything in order?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I'm just grateful someone found it and handed it in." She got up, extended her hand. "If I learn anything of use to you, I'll be sure to return the favour."

Chapter 18

Anna walked next to her father in silence, arms crossed, counting the steps to the junction with Government Avenue where their paths would diverge.

"So what was all that about?" he said as they ducked under the beard of a New Zealand Christmas tree blocking the path.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't play games with me."

Anna surged forward. "Are you saying it's my fault that creep interrupted us?"

"I'm talking about that card he passed you." He was level with her now, a dozen yards from the avenue.

Anna shrugged. "I guess I must have dropped it somewhere." She was on the Avenue now, about to peel right toward her residence. It felt like early evening in the gloom of the oaks. "You know, in my walks about the city."

"Yes, but where? You must know, surely."

"So now you don't believe me?"

"No, no, I mean yes: of course I do. But just for argument sake, let's suppose you dropped it in Adderley Street. That's where you said you were this morning, isn't it? And some Good Samaritan finds it, lying in the ditch. Wouldn't they hand it in at the police station? Or the post office. How would it find its way to this de Villiers character - who happens to be investigating me, same day? You telling me it's all coincidence?"

"Ask me." Anna shrugged. "But either way, he would have come today anyway. Think about it. If his men had already been to Rietvlei and reported back, it means that he's been investigating for at least a week."

"Ge. How do we know he wasn't making all that nonsense up? To unsettle us. These plainclothes manne are a devious lot."

Anna felt her father's hand clamp on her wrist. The avenue was deserted except for a beggar fifty yards toward Orange Street, slumped chin on chest. "There's something you're not telling me," he said. "And don't give me that innocent bakkie look. This isn't time for hide and seek. We've got to come up with a plan."

"No," she said. "Not 'we', 'you'." She shook her arm free. "You got us into this mess with the Germans. You get us out."

He studied her eyes for weakness. "You're right. And I will. But first, I need to know everything."

Anna plucked his fob watch from his pocket. "Oh dear: it's almost two. My friends are waiting." She took a step up the path. A couple approached, holding each other close. The lady was slight and dainty, like a ballerina, and the gentleman barely a man.

"Nee wat," he said when they'd swept past. "Not so fast."

"What is it now?" she said. "I really must go."

"You must never see that man again. You know who I'm talking about."

Anna felt her chest tighten. She was back on the farm. Fifteen. The day he found her in Kleinjan and Hannah's kitchen, drinking coffee with Willem. A night of lectures. Threats. Another death blow to innocence. She stood up on her toes, looked down. How could he know? She said, "I'll see who I want to."

"I'm afraid it doesn't work like that."

"So how does it work? I'm nineteen. Second year at university. With respect, Papa, you can't tell me what to do anymore."

He coughed, swallowed phlegm. "You're right. In a technical sense. You do what you please." His jaw shifted left to right and left again, his eyes evading hers.

"Good. I'll need to be gone then. Thanks for lunch."

He coughed again. This time a dry one, followed by another. "There's something you need to bear in mind." He glanced left and right and over her shoulder, hands together in a steeple.

Anna felt a tingle in her spine, starting at her coccyx and shifting upward. "Yes?"

Her father collapsed the steeple, turned his hands palms down. When he lifted his head his eyes were locked on hers. "Your mother's will."

The tingle was at her neck now. The sound of kids playing far off, floated above the hum of traffic.

"As trustee—together with the Dominee—I have a fiduciary responsibility to respect each and every provision of the trust, in letter and in spirit."

A squirrel had appeared, close by Anna's feet. It eyed her, tail bushed and ready to dart. She watched, her breathing sharp and shallow. Her inheritance was in the balance, her lifeline to freedom. And the person still closest to her in all the world was threatening to scupper it.

"Article 13 B stipulates that the beneficiaries shall at all times conduct themselves and their affairs in service of and loyalty to the Crown...Julia..." His voice trailed off. "Bless her soul, I miss her. She was a loyalist to the end."

The squirrel held an acorn in its hands, sat back on its haunches. Its eyes were bulged and alert.

"What's Mama got to do with any of this?" she said.

He glared at the squirrel. "Voertsek, jy." Now back at Anna. "I didn't want it to come to this. You must believe me."

"What are you saying? You don't mean..."

"Engel," he said. "Put yourself in my shoes for a day. I swore an oath to your mother. The day before she died. To abide by her wishes." His right cheek broke into a maze of cracks, as if he'd swallowed a shot of lemon juice. "As an Afrikaner, Boer, son of a bittereinder – you have no idea how difficult this has been. First your English tutors. Then the newspapers: hell, I still want to burn those things when I see them lying about your room. And then..." He swallowed. "My own constituents are gossiping. Do you know that my enemies have called me a volksverraaier when I let you go to university in Cape Town? You've been nothing but trouble..."

Anna's breathing had almost stopped. She was thinking of another way of interpreting his words. "Tell me I'm wrong," she said. "Please. I don't think I can live knowing you'd sink to this, this level, you..."

He stepped closer, put a hand on her shoulder. "I'm doing this for your good," he said. "Please believe me. You can't be seen with that enemy of the state again. Promise me."

"Seen?" She dropped her shoulder and drew away from his hand. "What are you saying?"

"I know about the dance last night. Sies: I told you dancing caused promiscuity. You and Thomas acting like you were gekys, or worse."

"You followed me, spied on me. How dare you?"

"Ag, come now, Engel. I've got better things to do that spy on my daughter. Especially when all I have to do is speak to old loose lips Douglas. Shame, it must be lonely being the only MP for his party. Man, those souties from Natal love to talk."

"Elizabeth." Anna cursed herself. Did she really think her housemate and so-called friend would keep her promise of confidence? She must have been on the phone to her father first thing in the morning. "I can't believe this is happening," she said, staring. "That you'd threaten my inheritance like this. And for seeing the very man you introduced me to, encouraged me to entertain on the farm. You hypocrite."

"He's not what I thought he was," he said. "I can't explain now. It's just...he's danger."

She glanced up the avenue. The beggar was sitting more upright now, turned toward them, face still buried under his hat. Back to her father. "And if I told you I'm in love with him? That he makes me happier than I've ever been. Would you still forbid it?"

For a moment he was wordless.

"Don't break my heart again." Anna suddenly felt exhausted. "Thomas isn't Willem. You said it yourself. There are connections. With your foster family. He's an aristocrat. An officer. Surely, if you ever would, you'd approve of this."

"Yes, yes, you're right. He's an impressive individual. No-one could argue that. And I also like him. But now isn't the right time. The war, I mean. Our world is upside down. You and I, Kleinjan. We could lose everything. Our lives even. It's him or us. Trust me on this. My decision stands."

Anna knew well the futility of arguing against her father when his mind was set. "Well then," she said, "I'll leave you to work things out." She turned and started up the avenue. "To your ends. As always."

Anna dragged her feet down the last hundred feet of the oak-arched mile of Government Avenue toward the top of Adderley Street, heavier for the meal and the thought of the afternoon ahead. Unlike her new friends, she'd never considered the act of shopping as more than a means to an end. Like the three hour roundtrip from the farm to the cooperative in Bredasdorp for sheep dip and seed. Or the general dealer in Struisbaai for provisions. But for Elizabeth it was clearly more, a form of entertainment at the very least, perhaps even an act of self-expression. She imagined her friend in her knee-length sleeveless dress, perhaps already milling about the foyer of Stutterfords. How much, apart from fathers in politics, did they really have in common? She looked at her watch. At least she had another twenty minutes to herself.

"Psst." A hiss, startled her from diagonally behind.

She spun about. The beggar was prostrate on the bench, head on chin. He clutched a bundle of old clothing wrapped in a blanket. For a moment her spirits soared. Could it be him?

"Sorry," the man said, struggling upright. His overcoat, without buttons, fell open to reveal a pitted shirt. His face was still obscured.

There was something wrong with the voice. Anna looked up to avoid eye contact. Behind him and to the left the dome of the observatory stood proud at the end of the High Court buildings. To the right was the sandstone façade of the library and the steeple of St. Georges Cathedral. Her spirits plunged, rose again in hope. Before looking down, she said, "Thomas?"

The beggar lifted a lazy hand to his hat, lifted it to her stare. His hair, dark, tumbled out in a matted knot. His mouth broke into a smile. Both his front teeth were missing. "Spare a shilling for the homeless," he said. "There's a lady."

"I...I...I'm sorry," she said. "I thought you were someone...Never mind." She reached into her bag, drew out the change from her father's pound the day before.

The beggar's smile broadened. There were molars missing, black teeth. "God bless," he said, taking the money in his shaking hand. "The lady's kindness overwhelms me."

"It's nothing." She sighed, closed her bag and turned. A sadness enveloped her like a winter fog. The day was scarcely past half way and she was exhausted. "There's not much between us," she said to herself as she walked on. "Just because I have four walls and a bed, doesn't mean I has a home."

Chapter 19

Anna recognised his pigeon chest strut before she could put a name to it. He was rounding the top of Adderley Street, having just passed the entrance to the former slave lodge, which since the mid 1880's had served as the magistrate's court. His every step on the pavement scattered a clutch of pigeons as though parting a feathered sea. By the time she remembered he was upon her.

"Magtig," she said, by instinct in Afrikaans. "It's you."

Fanus froze, chest out, head back. His jaw was clean-shaven and his cheeks reddened. The kind of face that would take decades to show age. "Anna. Who would have thought we'd...?" He was recovering fast. "My jinne, you're as beautiful as ever."

"Ag," she ran a hand through a wave of her hair to her cheek. For his faults he could be nothing if not charming. "That's kind."

"Did you receive my message?"

"Where was that?"

"At your apartment, of course. What's wrong?"

"How did you know my number? Nobody does. Only Papa...Goodness, he never learns. What time was that?"

"Oh, ten minutes past nine, give or take. Your friend promised to pass on the message."

"Tss." Anna shook her head. "That Elizabeth."

"Doesn't matter," he said. "I'm seeing you now."

"What was it about?" She immediately regretted having asked.

"Oh, nothing." His shoulder's hunched, and he looked away, back again. "I was just...you know...seeing if you would like to come to the bioscope with me this evening."

Anna scrounged for excuses. None sprung to mind so she bought time. "I uh...thought you were on the farm. You said..."

"Ja, that's right." His chest shrank as he exhaled. Though he was looking at her his pupils flicked here, then there. "I meant the Durbanville place." He turned his face down St Georges Street in the direction of the Tygerberg hills. "You wouldn't believe the labour problems we're having at the quarry again. You know, those people never stop complaining. And fighting each other. If it's not about money it's some guy stole another's wife."

She appraised his suit. Three-piece with a waistcoat, and, as always tailored to a size too tight. His shoes were Italian leather, pointed at the toe, with hard tips. "You sure dress fancy for a farmer, no?"

Fanus wiggled his chest as a duck would preening. "I'll take that as a compliment." He looked down and flicked a ball of fluff from his shirt. "You know me – I always try to maintain standards. Even when on the job."

Anna smiled without meaning it. "Ja. You never were one to get your hands dirty."

"What's that supposed to mean?" He adjusted the hang of his jacket on both shoulders. "You know, Anna, you mustn't be so cynical. It doesn't suit a lady in your position. Anyway, I was just at the bank." He indicated over his shoulder across Wale Street to the triple story building on the corner of St Georges.

Ann sighed. It never took long for a conversation with Fanus to turn to money. She waited for the inevitable.

"Did I tell you we're getting a new harvester for the Napier farm?"

"If you did I wasn't listening."

"Ja. One of those new imported diesel engines. I tell you, they'll take the place of half a dozen workers with none of the nonsense."

Anna felt a sense of unease. An alarm going off but faint and without a name.

He coughed into his jacket sleeve. "Oh, I could have sworn...We must speak more often, you and I." He sniffed. "You remember those South Wester okies we met at your place the other night, the Germans?"

Anna sensed trouble, didn't respond.

He eyed her. "I thought so. Jinne, you couldn't take your eyes off that pretty boy. What was his name again, Timothy or something?"

"Thomas." Anna hoped her blush wouldn't betray her. "And for what it's worth: he definitely isn't my type. Way too full of himself. Like...never mind."

Fanus laughed. "Just joking. Anyway, the other guy Kurt, he sure knows how to do the hard sell, hey. Came to see me the very next day. On a weekend nogal."

She tightened the cardigan about her shoulders.

"Tell me..." Fanus kept his eyes trained on hers.

She remembered why she had stopped going out with him. One of the reasons, at least. The way he could make an ordinary conversation feel like an interrogation.

"You haven't seen him, have you?"

She tried to keep a dead-pan, looked through him toward where she imagined the flag to be above the magistrate's building. "Who, Kurt? She forced herself to meet his gaze. "Shouldn't you be the one telling me?"

"No, the pretty boy."

"Thomas? Goodness no. Why?"

"Ag, nothing. It's just they were supposed to revise their quote. Jinne, it was expensive, hey. But next thing they just disappeared."

Another stream of cars passed, some so close as to almost brush her. The waft of exhaust fumes felt warm and light-headed. Anna followed the trajectory of a Chevrolet as it veered left into Adderley toward Wale Street. When it had disappeared about the bend she turned to face him, hoping the

cool air would dampen her cheeks. She was damned if she was going to give anything away before he did. "That's strange."

A seagull cawed from the half mist above them and then it was only the sound of traffic. Fanus glanced at his watch. "If you're anything like me, you'd be starving by now." His eyes darted left and right, ahead and past her. "Come on, let me get you lunch. It's not every day I have the pleasure of bumping into you."

"That's kind," she said. "But I've just eaten. With Papa."

He searched her with his eyes. "Oh..." He glanced up Government Avenue, which trailed toward the distant mountain like a green ocean wake. "Isn't your place in Gardens?"

Anna laughed. "That's where I sleep. It doesn't mean I have to hang around there all day. Anyway..." She clutched at her bag. "I'm going shopping."

His chest was out again, shoulders back. "Ge. I thought you hated all that?"

She looked down. Wanted to walk fast and away, thankful she'd brought her closed shoes without heels. "People change."

He edged closer. Despite the hour, she could smell his aftershave. He said. "At least join me for tea. For old time's sake." He gestured across the road again. "There's a lekker little place down St Georges. Two minutes' walk. Come on."

His hand was about hers before she could protest; it felt unduly cold and made her shiver. Before she could object he was steering her into the road to take advantage of a break in the traffic.

Inside, the café it was smaller than Anna had hoped, and they were the only patrons. Fanus led her to a table the size of a drain cover by the window; it had two cast iron chairs opposite each other with cushions. He pulled out the chair for her and slid it under her and sat. They studied the menus in silence until the proprietor arrived. She was a wiry lady with oversized glasses who looked old enough to have retired a long time ago. When she saw Fanus her wrinkles smoothed to the semblance of a smile. "You again," she said in Afrikaans, and glanced at Anna. The smile had turned conspiratorial. Then back to Fanus. "How can I help?"

In spite of Anna's protestations, Fanus insisted on ordering scones with cream and jam. It annoyed her how he so often did things like that, as if to make a point of her maternal English heritage.

The old lady presented the tray and retired. Fanus looked out the window and commented on the heat of the day, clearly waiting for Anna to pour the tea. She considered testing his resolve but then decided it was in her best interests to hurry things along and relented.

"Thank you, my love." He spooned two heaped sugars into his tea and stirred. "So..." He withdrew his teaspoon and tapped its end on the edge of his cup to drain it. Then he placed it carefully on the saucer. "You sure you haven't seen him then? The German."

"Why would I lie? Anyway, I already told you he's not my type." Anna sipped at her tea, then tried to place the cup on the saucer without it rattling. Trepidation was fast turning to anger. "And what's it got to do with you, who I see and when?"

"You're right. Excuse me." He stirred his tea again and this time he withdrew his spoon and held it an inch above the surface. When the last drop had fallen he replaced it on the saucer. "It's just that you two looked so comfortable together."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know, cosying up. Like at the windmill."

A pair of bespectacled men doddered past the window in bowler hats. One, paused on his walking stick and smiled at Anna. She nodded and turned back to Fanus. "You're funny," she said. "A woman has a conversation with a stranger, next thing they're lovers?"

He swallowed a mouthful of tea and grimaced as if from biting into a lemon. He glared at the cup. "I still don't see what you people like about that stuff. Call me a boer with pleasure but I'll take a moerkoffie any day of the week." He replaced the cup. "You mustn't put words in my mouth, you know."

She laughed. "I didn't have to. Your face says it all. Come on silly: it's been more than a year and you're still jealous as sin."

"Bleddy colonials." He glanced at the proprietor at the door. She was scouring the pavement for patrons. "They even make a good Afrikaner woman behave like a mak Engelse."

"Oh, come on. You're not in Bredasdorp."

He straightened. "This is every bit as much my country, I'll—"

She placed a hand on his forearm. "Relax. This isn't the time for a rant."

He pushed his cup and saucer aside. "You're right. Forgive me."

She felt his hand close over hers and she didn't hurry to remove it. Some part of her wanted to rekindle the feelings she'd once had. They reminded her of simpler times, when her world was prescribed by life on the farm and a thirty mile radius. "Fanus," she said. "What are you doing?"

"Give me another chance," he said. "Please. The time before...We were too young."

"You mean *I* was," she said. "*You* were second year of university, remember." Her hand twitched. His grip tightened.

"We've known each other all our lives." He stroked the top of her hand with his middle finger. "At least it feels like it."

"That's not my fault..." She stopped. "Sorry. That came out wrong. You've always been a gentleman to me. Like a brother, really. It's just..."

The proprietor had appeared at the table, pen in hand again.

"Excuse me?" Fanus turned.

She blushed. "Anything else for you two?"

Fanus declined. When the old woman had left he leaned forward toward Anna. His fringe fell like a stage curtain over his eyebrows. By conventional measures he wasn't a postcard to look at but if she tried a woman could make an argument that he was handsome. "It's time to put the past behind us," he said. "Start again. We're older now, wiser." He stroked hers with his whole hand now. "Just imagine. We'd be perfect."

"You mean you'd be," she said. "It's always been about you, hasn't it? Your farms. Your law degree. Your career. All you'd want me for is to round out the perfect picture. Come on: deny it. The only

part I'll play in your grand scheme is to stay looking pretty and produce an heir." She yanked her hand and this time freed it. "I'm not interested, Fanus. That's not the life for me."

He withdrew his hand. The proprietor delivered the bill and stood at hand. Fanus signed it without checking the details, produced a note and told her to keep the change. He watched her bustle into the kitchen, turned back to Anna and said, "You want to be an artist, don't you?"

"That would be a logical assumption of someone studying Fine Art."

"Ag, come on, Anna. There's no need to be sarcastic. Art's always been your passion, hasn't it? Jong..." He smiled. "I still remember competing with paintbrushes for your attention." He shifted his chair closer and their feet touched. "Just imagine: you'll have everything. A servant for this and that. You've seen how it is at our place."

Try as she may, Anna couldn't in that moment stop her mind from entertaining her fantasy of a life without want of money. Not that she'd ever lacked for anything, really. As Papa was so fond of saying, they had always been infinitely better off than so many of their fellow Afrikaners, who'd struggled with extreme poverty after the war with the British. Darn your socks, he'd insist. Burn those candles to the ground. Clean the plate. There was no doubt his obsession with money came from those years as a refugee before their grandfather established his veterinary practice in Germany. But, though she understood the importance of not wasting, she was determined never to saddle her own children with the same insecurity.

"That's all very well," she said. "But you've said it before yourself..." She turned the teapot first in one direction then the other. "I'm too English. I'd be a liability in your circles."

"Ja, ja." He had that pleased with himself look again. "I've thought of that. But actually, it's an advantage. When I'm... Let me put it this way: any politician in this country has to deal with the English question. Love them or hate them...we need each other. As they say, Africa isn't for sissies. We have to stick together if we're going to survive in this place."

"Stick together? Against who? Die 'anderskleuriges'? You don't need to cotton wool your words with me, Fanus. I know how you see things."

He straightened, puffed at his cheeks. "Oh yes? And how else does a person look at it? Like those disciples of Lenin running that excuse for an educational institution up there." He pointed in the direction of the mountain. "Don't be fooled, Anna. You may feel sorry for the natives and with good cause. They've not always been treated right. Even I can understand that. But at the end of the day it's not about wages or working conditions, economic opportunities. It's a power struggle, plain and simple."

Anna pulled a tissue from her sleeve and daubed her nose, then replaced it. "I don't care. There's no excuse for what you people are planning to do to the volk."

"You people?" His cheeks were rosier now, even than usual. "Let me remind you whose party is leading the charge for Apartheid."

She closed her bag on her lap, made to stand. "How dare you bring my father into this?"

"Well, I mean, if anyone is a racist it's—"

Anna stood. The table rocked on its feet, rattling the tea-set. "That's it. I've had enough."

Fanus was up in a flash, blocking her path to the door. "Wait," he said. "I didn't mean to offend, promise. You know how I admire your father, his ideals. Even if we don't agree on means."

They stood beside their table. The café was empty except for an elderly couple by the far wall. They appeared not to have heard anything.

"I know how close you are to each other." Fanus' cheeks had sagged again, and lost some red. "It's just, you know, he won't always be there to dote on you."

"What's that supposed to mean? Papa's not going anywhere."

"He's a man, Anna. You can't expect him to stay unmarried forever."

"Who said I did? It's me that keeps encouraging him to date. But it's been like this ten years now and he seems happy enough."

"A person sees what they want to see."

Anna thought of Margriet, the blushing, the touches.

"Come now." He was close to her now: his aftershave like roses and ice.

"Think what a couple we'd make." His shoulders were back. It looked like he'd won at the races. "I'm going to be a powerful man," he said, eyes this way and that, voice soft now. "Sooner than you think. Believe me. The farms will be the least of it."

Anna paused before responding. Something bothered her about his last comment but she couldn't put her finger on it. "I'm not following your logic."

Fanus glanced about. The proprietor had retreated to her cash register and was hammering at the keys. He leaned forward. "You know I'm an activist," he said. "All through my time at Stellenbosch. I've never kept that from you." His eyes were focussed and large, like seen through a looking glass.

She swallowed her reply, waited.

"I can't explain now." He looked out the window. An old lady with white hair in a bun nudged past. "But God be my witness..." He turned to Anna. "We'll have our republic. Believe me. It's just a matter of time."

She felt the room moving but wasn't quite sure why. More faces, all old, stared at her from the pavement.

"And when it happens," he continued. "I'm going to be a leading light. Trust me on this one, my love. We'll make your father proud."

Anna slung her bag over her shoulder.

"All right. I can see all this is still hard for you." Fanus fished into his inside jacket pocket and pulled out a business card. "It's understandable. The harvest doesn't ripen in a day."

She raised her eyebrow, trying not to think what he was about to suggest.

"Let's do something fun together for a change. No heavy talking. No pressure. How about the bioscope tonight? Lectures haven't started yet, am I right?"

"Oh..." Anna struggled to think of an excuse. "I've...my friends wanted me to..."

He handed her his card. "Come on, it will be fun. You choose the flick. Hey, there's one with Carey Grant, just came out. Called *Suspicion*, something like that. You love that oke, don't you? Fontaine doesn't look half bad in that red dress either. You should see the posters."

"I'm sure. Ag, its sweet of you to ask me, but..." As usual when at a loss for what to do, Anna resorted to the truth. "I really just need an early night tonight. All the travelling – I only moved back into my lodgings night before last. And you know how I always battle to get to sleep at first."

"Fine. I understand. Tomorrow?"

"Oh. Just us? But...um...what about—"

He put a hand up to stop her. His chest was out and he was swallowing a smile. "Don't worry," he said. "I've spoken with your father. He's fine with us being alone, even here in the city. He trusts me, remember."

"That may be," she said, "But I don't anyway need his permission any more. I'm nineteen for heaven's sake. I'm my own woman here in Cape Town."

"Ja. But you know me...Come Anna. Just this once. Is that too much to ask from a friend?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "But I can't commit. Not now."

He pointed at the card. "That's my number at the quarry. If you change your mind..."

She slipped the card into her handbag. "Thanks for the tea," she said, looking at her watch. "My friends will be wondering where I am."

"Think about it at least," he called after her. "Think of all the fun we used to have."

Chapter 20

Anna held detective de Villiers' business card in her lap with one hand and ran it back and forth edgeways between the thumb and forefingers of the other. She was sitting at a table for four on the patio of the Hiddingh Campus' cafeteria, dappled in sunlight from the oak tree that towered overhead. It had been a frustrating morning, spent mostly at the lodgings, listening to Elizabeth's troubles in love. So much so, that she was almost looking forward to the lunch. Almost.

She gazed towards the bustle of students criss-crossing the plaza. They were, for the most part, men. She wondered how many of them had registered to avoid the embarrassment of not volunteering. To the right, approaching down the driveway from Orange Street, someone she recognised from her drama class. The girl walked with a spring in her step and her blonde wavy hair bounced off her shoulders. Despite also being a second year student, she seemed to know everyone. Probably, it was because she'd been to a private school, one of those places in Natal where they were taught to speak English with an accent more affected than the queen's. Anna thought about her platteland accent. Perhaps that was why she was battling to fit in. Either that, or she was just socially awkward. It didn't matter: she could only remember one time in her life that she'd felt as alone. Three weeks to the day, before she turned nine.

By the time they'd allowed her in the room the body was cold. It was strange how in that moment her mother, lying with her fingers clasped on the crocheted spread, had looked more alive than she had in months. Though at the time it was hard to witness the suffering, Anna would live to be thankful for the time together that the illness had gifted. The lazy hours reminiscing, the jigsaw puzzles, sipping tea on the stoep as the sun broke through the cloud to light the puddles dotted about the veld. Her mother had said how all that water remandered her of the Lake District where she'd holidayed as a child. How in those moments she missed the predictability of England - and her father who'd wept when she'd told him she was eloping to Africa.

Just then there was a rustle from the agapanthus shrubbery beyond her feet. A squirrel, rummaging for scraps. When it saw her it stopped, quivering, and reared its legs. Its eyes were bulging and fiery. For a moment they stared at each other. Then it darted into the greenery.

"There you are." It was her father with Margriet, approaching along the footpath. They were not quite arm-in-arm, but their hips touched and they walked in step. "Say, Engel." He pulled out a chair. When Margriet had settled he removed his jacket. He was out of breath and there were stains of sweat in the armpits of his shirt. "I'm sorry we're late. So much to do. Margriet also had to pull some newspaper articles for Daniel." He glanced across the clearing to the clock on the sandstone façade of the medical school building. "Jong, this afternoon's session is going to be critical."

Anna tried not to notice their exchange of glances. "Goodness, Papa," she said, poking him in the ribs. "You're out of shape, hey. What is it to walk here: half a mile, three-quarters to be kind?"

He laughed. "Feels a lot longer when you have to march." He swirled around, hand up to flag a waiter.

"Papa, it's my treat. Please. Relax." `

"Ja, but you didn't count on Margriet joining us, I'm sure. It's all right I hope?" He didn't wait for an answer. Instead he picked up the menu board and ran his finger down the offering. "Right. We'd better order. Margriet: what are you having?"

Margriet this. Margriet that. It was though, despite his protestations to the contrary, they were all but an item. Anna felt a little queasy, not sure she wanted to eat anything, after all. She said. "The quiche is good."

"Mmmh." Her father strained to read the price. Then he turned to Margriet. "What do you think, my lief?"

Lief. Anna wrinkled her nose. Now he was calling the woman his love. It would seem her intuition was right: there was more going on than a platonic friendship.

"Oh, no thank you," Margriet said. "I'm going to have the salad."

Anna kept studying the menu, and said. "Ag, Papa, just go ahead: have the cheeseburger: I know that's what you really want."

He laughed.

"It's self-service," Anna said, slipping the business card into her purse. Rising from her chair, she forced herself to look at Margriet. Floral dress to the ankles, clingy, with a pearl necklace. Why did the woman have to dress like every day she was the prime minister's wife at the opening of parliament.

Her father's forehead furrowed. He glanced at the queue at the counter. "Really, Anna, I told you we should have rather eaten at Parliament. You know I hate waiting for food."

"You hate waiting for anything." She dropped the menu board to the table. "Can't you just relax for once, allow me to spoil you? Why does it always have to be on your agenda? Really. It's too much sometimes. I don't know why I try."

"Ag, my engel..." He placed a hand on her forearm. "I'm sorry."

They waited until the queue had shortened a little and then got up. Her father towered above the two of them and the other students. He never said anything in the three minutes they waited but it was obvious from his expression that he was trying everything to contain himself.

They returned to the table, set the trays down and unpacked their food and drinks. "So," he said when they'd settled. "How did lectures go today?"

"I told you," Anna said, bracing herself. "They start on Monday."

"What?" He lowered his fork, and ruminated on the pastry with his mouth part-open. "You mean you arty people are still bugging around whilst these..." He pointed at a student in a white cloak bustling towards the student union. "Serious okes are working their backsides off already." He sat back, stuffed the tail of his serviette further into his shirt.

Anna was cross with herself for suggesting the lunch. How could she think time with her father would make things clearer? It was like thinking that by tugging at a fishing knot long enough it would loosen of its own accord. And as for the idea of confiding in him: that simply wasn't an option with some floozy on his arm.

"Just because we deal in the abstract sometimes," she said, "doesn't mean an artist is any less serious than...a doctor say."

A youngster with a rucksack loped past. Anna recognised him as a drama student. He was probably on his way to the Little Theatre. They had rehearsals at two pm every other day. Perhaps their term too, had started already.

"Magtig," her father muttered. "That character could be a girl." He shook his head. "Sies."

Anna thought about changing the subject. The last thing she wanted to hear at that moment was another diatribe on the decline of morality among the youth.

"What were you doing with Kleinjan this morning?" he said.

Anna stopped chewing, surprised. How did he know, and what? It would be best to choose her words carefully. An approximately of the truth was always a safe place to start. "Ag, we just went for a walk. I wanted to go a bit further than usual, get some exercise and...you know...some parts of the city still make me a little nervous." She watched his face soften. "I hope you don't mind, she pressed her advantage. "Kleinjan said you didn't need him for anything."

"Didn't need him..." He chuckled. Then he continued chewing the piece of hamburger in the side of his mouth, swallowed it and took a sip of water. "Is that what he told you? Little skelm."

"Ag, Papa. You mustn't be cross with him. It was my—"

"Toemaar," he said, dismissing it with a hand palm up. "It just a last minute thing this morning, an errand I was looking for him to run. Doesn't matter, I found someone else." He glanced at Margriet. "Anyway, I'd rather you were safe and sound."

Anna felt the tentacles of guilt she'd been fending since leaving the Stakesby Lewis Hostel prod at her again. For all her father's faults, there was no denying he cared for her. She thought of the business card in her purse. How could she contemplate...? But then, how could she not?

A seagull swooped under the eaves and touched down beside their table. It bobbed its head at her father and stepped forward. He kicked at it and the bird squawked and flew out of reach.

"Foeitog, poor bird."

"How was your walk?" he said.

She picked at her pastry and tossed a crumb to the floor. The seagull pecked it, shuddered and swallowed.

"I was asking you something."

"Sorry. What was that?"

"How was your walk? See something interesting."

She took a bite off her fork, taking time to swallow. "Ag, you know, I just went to a few shops. Those smaller ones: that sell arts and crafts, necklaces, bracelets that sort of thing. The kind of place you can't stand. Remember when Mama used to..."

Silence fell at the table. Margriet pushed her plate aside, having eaten less than a third of her salad. She rummaged in her handbag, fished out a tube of lipstick and a mirror and started touching up her lips.

Anna couldn't bear to look at the ceremony and turned away. She could see Mount Nelson's palms behind the medical building and above that the table top of the mountain. Then her vision blurred with tears.

Margriet put the lid on her lipstick. Then she stood, straightening her dress. "I think it is better if I leave you two alone, don't you agree?" She didn't wait for an answer. "Thank you for the lunch, Anna. I suppose it was good to get to know you a bit better." She stuffed the lipstick back in her bag. "Although it's hard to be sure." Then she turned. "I'll see you back in the library, Stefan."

By the time Anna's father could think to react, Margriet had marched down the path and reached the plaza. He made an attempt to stand and called out to her but she either didn't hear him or ignored him and continued around the corner. He reclined, glaring at his daughter. "Listen." His right index finger half-cocked in front of her. "Wragtag. What did you do that for? It's so unnecessary, really. Margriet might not be up to your lofty standard of virtue but she's a...she's good for me." He glanced up at the branches. A spike of sunlight shone in one eye and the other was shaded. Then he scowled. "It's been ten years, my girl, since your mother died. Ten years for heaven's sake. When are you going to get over her?"

Anna dropped her fork on her plate with a clink, ignoring the students at the table next to them who had swirled about to look. She tried to stand and as she did so her leg caught on the underside of the table, causing her cold drink to spill. "Get over her?" she said. The faces staring at her were fuzzy and she was sure her tears were showing but she didn't care. "So I must just 'get over' my very own mother? You know there was a time when I had to put up with you saying these things, your putdowns, your shouting." She grabbed her bag, pulled out a tissue and daubed her eyes. "Yes. Papa. Look at me. I'm crying. Same way I did all those nights you sent me to my room without supper for mentioning her name. Crying."

"That's enough." He glanced about. The conversation at other tables had stopped. Like the patrons of the cafeteria were focussed on the conflict erupting before them. "Sit. Please."

Anna snapped her bag closed but remained standing. Her shoulders pulled back, as if by themselves. She felt a strength she'd not known she possessed. It was as if her fury had opened the sluice gate of a dam that had been a decade in the filling. "You know," she said. "One of the wonderful things about leaving home last year has been that I never had to endure your...your abuse another day."

"Now, now, Engel." He rose, put a hand on her forearm. "There's no need to make such a scene."

"A scene?" She raised her voice another notch. "You're worried about..." She glared at the group seated at the next table. When the girl averted her gaze, Anna turned back to her father. "You worry about a scene? I knew it. All you care about is your bloody public image."

"Ag, Anna. It's not ladylike to swear. Sit." He patted her forearm. "Asseblieftog. Let's just be friends - like we've always been. Kom nou."

"Friends?" Anna removed a strand of hair from her face. She still couldn't see clearly but it didn't matter. "Since when have we been friends for goodness' sake? If I obeyed your every command, maybe. Acted the helpless little girl. Well, I've got news for you, Papa: things have changed. And...You think you can whitewash the memory of the only person who every truly cared for me, in favour of that...that tramp? Well, you're wrong. I won't stand for it, not another minute. And if you don't think twice about betraying the memory of your own wife like that why shouldn't I..." Anna realised she was shaking. She yanked her hand free and slung her bag over her shoulder. Then she hitched her thumb under the strap of her handbag to steady it.

“Ja,” he said. “What was that you were going to say?”

Anna shifted the strap a half inch on her shoulder. “What do you mean?”

“You were going to say something. Like ‘why shouldn’t I do something or other.’”

“Ag. It’s nothing.”

He eyed her.

“What I mean...is...should I carry on as if everything is all right when it isn’t?”

His eyebrow was raised again. “Come on, I’m not stupid.”

It was inch beyond the pale. Not anything specific he had done or not done. Simply the way he made her feel. Anna pushed her chair in. “You know, Papa: I’ve been thinking about things...you and I...that it’s best we don’t see each other. For a while at least.

“But Engel, what are you talking about? You can’t just get up and leave like this. I won’t have it, I—”

“Goodbye, Papa.” She readied herself to turn. “This will be better for both of us.”

Chapter 21

Every step Anna trudged down Strand Street along the edge of the Parade felt heavier. The intermittent shade of the palms offered scant relief from the three o'clock sun and her dress was wet at her arms and the small of her back. Several times in the course of the mile-long walk from campus, she'd taken De Villiers' business card out of her pocket, as if hoping that in reading it enough times she'd get the answer to the question that haunted her.

She stopped opposite the entrance to City Hall and studied, yet again, the address on the back of the card. Why was his office here, not at the police headquarters? The document he'd shown them earlier had the watermark of the castle. She conjured his face. The brush moustache. Short back and sides. His fastidious manner. How could a man so obviously steeped in the bureaucracy of government be trusted? No, she'd made the right call.

She pressed on toward the castle, passing the statue of Edward the Seventh with his cap in hand and flowing cape. She thought of Fanus and his Stellenbosch friends' ranting against empire. At the time she'd dismissed them as blind fanatics. But they did have a point: what right did this distant monarch have to lord it over them? She continued, hugging the intersecting circles of shade from the palms. Beyond the castle she could see the junction she'd approached from right angles the day before. She thought of Mannie and his colleagues and shuddered. They were so near yet so far - the Parade like a no-man's land between a city of two halves.

She came to another statue: this time of a khaki soldier supporting an Afrikaner girl in distress. Unusual for Cape Town, it was a Boer War Memorial. But with its history written by the victor. *Never a king had such loyal subjects*, the inscription read. She swallowed. Loyal? An Afrikaner to an English king? It made no sense.

When she got to within a stone's throw of the castle she stopped. The walls were imposing as ever from close up, of limestone mortar speckled by slate. She waited as a platoon of soldiers marched past the lion busts and across the moat to the entrance. Happy to buy more time. In the walk across town, her deciding had changed to rationalising. If she didn't tell the powers that be, someone else would. It was only a matter of time before she'd lose any chance of claiming the moral high ground and a plea for clemency. Besides, Mannie's blackmailing her to inform the authorities didn't leave her much choice.

The soldiers trod to a halt before the guard. The drill sergeant's salute made her think of Thomas. His certainty, the way he led a dance. Ah, Thomas. What was it about him? Somehow he could keep a conversation flowing with no fear of silence. And the way he made her feel. There was always the promise of a kiss. Why did she have to do this? Why was life so cruel?

She waited until the platoon had disappeared under the entrance before continuing. The guard stiffened as she approached, pretending not to notice her. She could see past him through the arch, to a line of men snaking along the grass of the courtyard. The guard shifted on his feet, squishing the gravel. There was still a chance to turn. Why not stew on it a little more? Go back to the farm say. Things always seemed clearer there. Time and space to think.

"Yes, ma'am?" the guard said. "Is your boyfriend here?"

She looked past him. The men in the queue were in civilian dress, a score or more, chatting. Some sucked cigarettes. Others chewed. There was a sense of excitement, as if they were kids waiting for a ride at a funfair.

"Ma'am?"

"What was that?" Anna turned back, as if waking from a daydream.

"Who is it you would like to see?"

"Oh yes." She adjusted her hat so that the knot faced forward. "The officer in command."

The guard braced. Against the backdrop of the wall it looked as if he was preparing to have his height measured. The bougainvillea behind him rustled over his helmet. "I'm afraid that won't be possible, ma'am. The colonel insists that prior arrangements be made."

Anna dropped her chin as if crestfallen.

"Sorry. May I ask what it is you wish to speak to him about? Perhaps I can help."

She lifted her chin an inch. Noticed the orange flash on the soldier's shoulder. It gave her an idea.

"Actually," she said. "What I'm really here for is to volunteer. Woman's Auxiliary Defence."

The guard raised an eyebrow without budging his head. Then he shifted the rifle across his chest.

"You old enough?"

"How dare you?" Anna took a step toward him. "I've been driving a tractor and cooking for a household since you were in nappies, and you question my age?"

His face was like the stone behind him.

"Listen." Her face was almost touching his. "I'm sure you don't want me to tell your colonel how you leered at a lady."

"No, ma'am." He patted his rifle.

"All right." She reached into her bag for her purse. "I'll give you something to work with, if you must." She pulled out her student card and waved it across his face. "Professor Pickford-Dunn sent me. A graduate recruit."

As Anna sailed across the lawn the men grew quiet. Some grinned, others stared. From the anonymity of the end of the queue she surveyed the scene. From inside, the castle seemed smaller and less intimidating. The star-shaped layout of the perimeter was intersected by a residence building with an entrance designed to impress. To the right was another, simpler doorway.

Just then an elderly soldier draped in medals appeared. He made as if to assess the weather, and retired. Anna turned to the nearest recruit. "Say, what's his name?"

"Whoa." The man clenched his cigarette between his teeth and adjusted his cap. "Not so fast." He looked around at the others. "We're like you. Green as the fields of England. But if I had to guess I'd say he's the OC." He extended a hand. "Patrick."

Anna brushed his hand as she passed. "Thanks. Good luck up North."

No one stopped her from entering the building. After the sunlight she struggled to make out the layout of the hallway. There were two open doors. Through the nearest she could see a woman hunched over a typewriter. Anna tip-toed to the second door and knocked.

"Yes."

"Excuse me, sir," she curtsied, removed her hat. "Terribly sorry to disturb, but..."

"What is it?" He placed his pen on the pad and looked up. "Do you have an appointment, young lady?"

"No, but—"

"Janet," he called. "Here."

"Wait." Anna stepped up to his desk. "I have to talk to you in private. It's—"

The officer stared at her. The whiskers of his moustache caught a ray of light streaming in through a narrow window. "My dear," he said. "If I had to stop what I was doing for every passer-by who popped in for a chat I'd never get anything done. There's a war on for heaven's sake." He glared at the door. "Janet. I said now."

Anna turned to the door. There was a rustling of papers and heels on concrete. She turned back. "If I told you I know of a U-boat harboured on our coast, would you spare me five minutes?"

The officer stroked his moustache and eyed her. There were more steps in the hallway. "It's all right, Janet," he said to the door. "I'll take this one. Close that door will you."

He straightened the papers on his desk and motioned for Anna to sit. Then he shifted an hourglass into her line of sight and said, "Four minutes. Go on."

Anna watched the sand running through the constriction.

"I'm waiting."

She looked down, rotated her hat on her lap. "I'm sorry." She sniffed "I can't do this."

"What's the matter?" The officer leaned forward. "Why are you crying?"

Anna rummaged in her handbag, pulled out a tissue. A stash of papers and a pen followed. "He's my father," she said, gathering them. "How could I?"

"I can only help you if you open up. What you say will stay in this room. Promise."

She looked up. Her first impression had been that he was an honest man. But now there was a hollowness behind the eyes. Like he wasn't quite human. She wiped her eyes. Come right, she chided herself. Perhaps it was just her imagination. Anyway, it was too late for second thoughts. She looked down again, said, "The farm." She tugged at a tissue in her sleeve. "They've been supplying a German submarine."

Anna could hear the men outside laughing. A pigeon coo-cooed. The officer brushed the hourglass aside, peered at her. "You saw it yourself?"

"No, but..."

The officer straightened. "My dear, if I received a medal for every rumour of a U-boat sighting along our coast I'd be a field marshal." A chuckle of relief. "Let me guess. You saw lights, winking in the dark? Voices?"

Anna gripped her hat on her lap with both hands. "How can you not believe me? You haven't even..."

"What's your name?" he said, picking up his pen. "I'll take down your particulars. Get our men to look into it."

Anna stood and placed her hat on her head. "I can't believe what I'm hearing. I'm telling you there's an opportunity to intercept an enemy operation in our waters and you're dismissing me as a gossip?"

He studied her. "Hang on. Haven't I seen your face before? Yes. In the papers, the parliamentarian's girl, that's it..."

"It was a pleasure meeting you." Anna dusted her dress. Then she glanced at the hourglass. "I see my four minutes are up."

The last thing she heard on the way out was the officer calling for his secretary. Bursting into the sunlight of the courtyard, she felt a momentary lightness. Although, technically, she'd stopped at the Rubicon, she felt a certain relief. It was as though by the simple act of examining her fears, they'd shrunk. And, more importantly: she'd lanced the boil, made the call. All that was left was the guilt of the damned.

Chapter 22

The taxi drew up alongside the dance hall and stopped, its fan belt whining. The night air was warm and still and the wail of a saxophone could be heard from within the building. The bouncer in a shiny suit and hat stood guard at the entrance, his face impassive. Anna sat rooted in the back seat.

"This is it, ma'am," the driver said, adjusting his cap in the rear-view mirror. "Oddfellows. On Hope Street. That's what you asked for, right?" He met her eyes. "Ma'am?"

"What was that?" Anna said, retrieving her attention. "Oh, yes, of course." She scratched in her purse for the fare, as if buying time. How could she be so reckless? Meeting a strange man alone, at night? It was scandalous. And to make it worse, they were at the margins of the city proper, just two blocks from the District. A place of questionable repute.

Anna knew it was him by the angle of his slouch in the shadow. Leaning back against the sandstone wall, smoking. In an instant she felt as though she was standing on a ledge high above a rock pool, looking down at the water sparkling below: scared, but determined to jump. She opened the door enough to be visible and waited.

Thomas took a drag from his cigarette, extinguished it against the plaster, and turned. "Ah, there you are."

She slipped her legs into the opening.

"I was starting to think you had changed your mind."

Anna hesitated for a moment, then stepped onto the pavement. "Why would I do that?"

Thomas kissed past her left cheek. As he turned for the right one they bumped noses.

"My fault," he said. "I forget I am not in Europe."

She looked at her watch. Fourteen minutes past nine. She smiled to cover her awkwardness. "Don't you people still do the Akademische Viertel?"

"You know about that? I'm impressed."

"Ja." She laughed. "Papa uses it as an excuse for his being late. Which is often, you'd be surprised to hear. I remember it used to drive Mama mad. You would have sworn *she* was the honorary German."

Anna craned her neck to peer past the bouncer and through the entrance. It was difficult to make out exactly how many people were on the dance floor but it clearly wasn't full. Which raised the odds on being recognised. "Come," she said, squeezing Thomas's upper arm. "Let's get a drink first. Things only really get going here after ten."

"*Jawhol*," he said as she slid her arm under his. "Just tell me one thing: are all South African women such strong characters?"

Anna laughed, poked him in the ribs. As she led him to the next street corner she thought how she'd not felt as light as this in years. Light and heavy. It was crazy how one person could evoke such polar emotions simultaneously.

The café had about a dozen tables, mostly for twos and fours, spilling onto the pavement. Each table had a candle buried in an orange vase. The flames refracting through the glass were almost perfectly vertical. A pianist sat at an upright near the entrance and pawed a jazz tune.

Anna chose a table away from the other people. "So," she said. "What have you been up to all day?" "This and that."

She cupped her hands about the vase. The flame was short and fat and ate into the base of the candle. "I've missed you, you know."

"Goodness," she continued. "What's wrong with me?" She felt her cheeks warm and not from the candle. "I can't believe I just said that."

"It's in order." He placed the menu board face down and looked at her. "Really."

"No, I really shouldn't say things like that. It's just that all this is new to me. Goodness, I've never missed anyone after just one day. Except my mother..." She withdrew her hands and put them on her lap. The flame hissed for a moment, as if it was about to go out, and then flared to life again. A silence hung in the air.

"You were very close to her, weren't you?" Thomas said.

His face was somehow different. More human than before. It was as though he actually cared about her response. And that from a man not related. She said, "I wasn't even ten. Don't all little girls hang on their mother's apron?"

"I suppose," he said, also staring at the candle. There was a faint scar the size of a keyhole at his hairline which hadn't been visible before. "But I've never been a girl so wouldn't know, right?"

"Oh, don't be silly." Anna chided. "You must have seen it with your sister."

He held his finger an inch above the flame. Only when a patch of black appeared did he withdraw it. "Didn't I tell you I was an only child?"

"There's a lot you haven't told me. Make that everything." She could have sworn there was a tremor on his hand. "What's wrong?"

"There's a reason I don't talk about..." He gazed across the street. A couple sauntered in the direction of Oddfellows. The man, dark skinned with straight black hair, had his arm around the woman and his hand rested self-consciously on her exposed shoulder. Thomas swung back to face Anna. "Well all right. I suppose it makes no difference now..." He picked up the menu again without looking at it. "My mother...she was a beautiful woman. Glamorous, that's what the newspapers said of her. There wasn't a social function of consequence in Heidelberg you wouldn't find her at. Father was the same." Thomas closed his eyes and grimaced. "People called them the golden couple."

"But?"

"*Macht nichts.*" Thomas looked up and about for a waiter. "It's just...she never really wanted to be a mother - that's what I thought growing up, anyway."

Anna placed her hand on his forearm and felt him tense

"She was thirty-five when I was born," he said. "Is that even possible?"

"Ag, Thomas, you mustn't think just because—"

"No." He withdrew his hand. "She even told me once. That I was a - how do you say? - mistake."

"But that's terrible."

"Not really." He straightened a fraction. "I told you: I had everything I needed, I—"

"No, I mean...what you just said about being a mistake. It's awful you think that."

"It is in order. Really. I had everything a boy could want. Mein Gott, our house was almost as big as the Schloss. The finest gymnasiums, internat even. That is boarding school. It's not normal in Germany. Not even for the Adel."

They fell silent for a few moments. There was just the hubbub of the other tables and the brilling of a car cruising past. Then Thomas flung himself backward on his chair as if to seal the interlude of intimacy, and grinned. "Hey, I turned out well, correct?"

She appraised him from several angles, smiled. "I'd say."

He tapped a cigarette from his pack and put it to his lips. "Oh, sorry," he said, proffering her the pack. "You don't mind if I indulge?"

She eyed the crowned emblem. With the green and gold packaging it was a stylish proposition. "Ag, it's all right."

"You sure? It's not good for a man to smoke alone. What is wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. Just the dominee, he says it makes a girl look cheap."

Thomas leaned back, laughed. "That's funny." He swept his hand. "So you think all these ladies smoking here are...how do you say, common?" He tossed his head back, exhaled. "*Wahnsinn*. How old are you again?"

"Don't be silly. I wouldn't be here alone..." She scanned the room. "If I wasn't my own person."

He offered the packet again. "Go ahead. I can keep a secret."

Anna laughed. "That you can." She picked up the box and tugged at the wrapping. "Elizabeth's been on my case for months. Says it makes a woman look sophisticated. I don't know. Do you agree?"

"Me? I think you should do what pleases you. I've spent too much of my life listening to others."

She helped herself to a cigarette and placed it to her lips.

Thomas struck a match and held it up to the tip. "What, you look sceptical?"

Anna sucked on the cigarette until the end glowed, then quickly removed it from her mouth. Her lips felt dry and there was a burning sensation at the back of her throat so she coughed. "Yuck." She pulled a face at the smoke escaping from her mouth. "So, this is the way you rebel, is it? Incognito in a colonial backwater like Cape Town. Playing spy."

Thomas laughed, leaned back to light his own cigarette. When he'd blown smoke he signalled a waiter. After ordering two Martinis he looked out across the road in the direction of the dance hall. A taxi had rolled up to the entrance and a couple tumbled out. Even from a distance they were conspicuous. One wore a sleeveless sequin dress and was draped in pearls. His face was paler than it should have been and his eyebrows were obviously fixed in paint. The other wore a woman's wig, red lipstick and denim shorts below a blouse cropped at the waist. Both had high heels.

"I see what you mean about this place being different," Thomas whispered. "How often did you say you come here?"

"Oh, stop, silly. It's probably only three times the whole of last year. I don't know..." She watched the couple disappear into the hall. "People don't have hang-ups here. About race, language. It's just different."

"That would be no exaggeration. I can see the attraction. Really." He eyed her. "Plus, you're not likely to run into your father here."

She laughed and they slipped into easy conversation. After finishing their drinks, they wandered back to the entrance to Oddfellows. As they approached, the bouncer straightened. He was half a head taller than Thomas and twice his girth. In spite of it being dark outside, he wore sunglasses which covered half his face. "Ma'am." He tipped his hat as they passed. "Where are your friends tonight?"

"Ag, can you believe it? They just wanted to go to the bioscope." She glanced at Thomas. "Boring. I'd rather boogie till my feet blister. So who's the band tonight?"

"Ah." His face came alive. "Who else, sister. All the way from Joburg, *nogal*."

"No, you don't say. Sonny's Jazz Revellers?" She turned to Thomas. "You'll love them." She elbowed him. "Hey, don't look so worried. You'll get the hang of the vastrap in no time. It's as easy as one, two, three...Literally."

The bouncer appraised Thomas through his sunglasses. "Relax, my bra," he chuckled. "They also do the quickstep, a waltz too."

Thomas smiled, nodded. "Thank you," he said and kept walking. "You must excuse me. I'm from the North."

Anna squeezed his arm as they stepped into the foyer, leaned to his ear. "Why did you do that? Talk about up North. That could have all sorts of connotations. Not just up country."

He slowed. "I was just having some fun."

Inside, it was like a school hall, dimly lit, and warm. There were so many people it was impossible to move without squeezing between bodies. The ceiling was highest at the centre, with four-cornered arches ending at a plaster parapet that circumscribed the walls. Above and behind them was a balcony, in front was a semi-moon stage. The band was arrayed below the platform: a drummer in a tuxedo, an assortment of brass instruments but no violin.

Anna felt herself perspiring before they reached the dance floor, her breath short. It annoyed her that the excitement of being out alone with a strange man would trump the confidence she felt at a familiar beat. She was almost relieved when she felt him pulling back, thought of suggesting a drink to calm her nerves. Instead she tugged at his hand, smiled. "Say, where do you think you're going?"

As he shrugged the neck of his jacket crumpled. "Maybe some fresh air before we start? I don't know this music."

She laughed, feeling more at ease. "Hey, you can't do that. Last night you had me in knots with the Tango. Now it's your turn. Here..." Anna took his hand. "It's, easy, really." They were facing each other, their chests almost touching. She waited as he appraised the stance of a couple dancing past, then shivered as his hand settled behind her back. "That's it," she said, raising his leading hand to

shoulder height. "Now...Just follow my lead." She giggled. "This time at least. If you can bear it. "Step, step..." They still hadn't moved. "Quick one, two..." As he tightened his grip about her she could feel his hand through the damp of her dress as if it were directly on her naked back. "Three and away you go..."

"What was that?" he said. "Step, step, quick one..." They were moving with the beat now, their feet barely touching.

"Two three..." she continued, as if to herself. "And away we go..." When they had completed a circuit she turned her head to face him. Anna was on her toes and their eyes were almost level and within inches. "Is there anything you can't do, mystery man?" They continued past the band. "Talk about a natural," she said at the next pause in the music. "I've been doing a variation of this since I could walk and you just about put me to shame."

Thomas laughed. "You're too modest. I think you don't tell me everything. Who taught you to dance like an expert?"

Anna went quiet for two twirls.

"Ja?"

"Relax," she said as the music slowed. "It was a friend. Willem." As Thomas reversed the direction of the turn they pressed up hard against each other at the waist. Her lips were just below his ear. "We haven't seen each other for ages."

Thomas looked up at the band as he danced, moving to the rhythm without thinking. He steered her closer to the centre of the dance floor and stalled to let another couple pass. "Why is that?"

She looked at her feet, remembering how often as a fifteen year old she'd prayed they'd stop growing. Not knowing how she could endure the taunts of her classmates. Her faith had been rewarded in the end – the growth spurt had been mercifully short-lived – but there were still times she felt clumsy. "He went up North." She looked up again, eyes angry. "To fight. Or, rather, to drive a white man's truck."

He leaned closer. Another couple whirled by. "I am sorry for this war," he said. The song reached its crescendo and faded out. "I know you don't believe me, but truly I am. There was no need for any of this madness, I—"

"Ssh," she said. Their cheeks brushed. Only the music had paused but it felt like the universe was holding its breath. "It wasn't just the war that tore us apart." The band struck up a waltz. It sounded like a Strauss but she couldn't be sure.

He shifted his hand up her back and adjusted their arms to a fraction below the horizontal. "What then?"

They were taking small steps through the crowd now, their feet gliding in tandem across the floor. She couldn't remember a time she'd danced as close to a man before, and, though it scared her it felt wonderful and she didn't want it to end. "He volunteered. One of the first in the Cape."

"You must be proud of him."

The music had slowed and she was leaning into him. "Ja, but it wasn't his choice."

"That makes no sense."

"Papa made him do it."

"Who, Kleinjan's son? Why?"

He tensed, and pulled back a fraction to search her eyes.

"That's the way it works on a South African farm."

The waltz ended and the band leader grabbed the microphone. He rasped an apology for the lapse into sentimentality and promised a more upbeat next set after the break. Then he introduced the band members, starting with the saxophonist and ending with the trumpeters. Each player stood when announced, lifted his instrument in salute and bowed at couples drifting past toward the tables.

Thomas and Anna stayed in their embrace.

"Tell me something," he said, lowering his lips to her ear. "Why did you come?"

She drew back, felt his hand firm on her back. "What sort of question is that?"

"I am sorry," he said, "It is only that I didn't expect you would follow through tonight. It must have been a risk for you, no?"

She pulled away further. The pianist had struck up a tune and the trumpeters were draining their instruments. Soon the dance floor was empty save for a couple of stragglers on the far end. "What on earth do you mean? Do I really strike you as someone who would stand a man up? Really."

He coughed into his hand, reassumed his hold. She didn't resist. "It's just...your father...we are – how do you say it – not seeing face-to-face at the moment."

Anna tried to look surprised. "What do you mean?"

"Well..." He shifted his hand at her back, not relaxing his grip. "He's ignoring me. It makes me think he is about to turn on me."

"But that's—"

"No. It is in order. I would do the same". He studied her eyes. "Also." He coughed. "I suppose it's *verboden*, you and me, no?"

Anna held onto him, not wanting to move. They were alone on the dance floor. People were sitting at tables, ordering drinks. Some were looking at them. "I don't care what he says anymore." She let her face press against his neck. His aftershave smelled like sea mist and sweet.

"Is something the matter?"

"You want to know why I came tonight?"

He nodded.

She tried to steady the tremble in her legs but couldn't. "Sorry," she said, looking down. When their eyes met she drew back. "To say goodbye."

"Steady now." He shifted closer. Their legs were intertwined now. The pianist was trailing off a high scale over the hub-hub in the hall.

"And you?" she said. "Why did you come? You must know we have no future...or are you just like every other man. Taking advantage of a girl while you can." It felt like there were tears in her throat but she was too distressed to cry. "Grandma was right. Men are all the same."

"Shh...Anna, I can't change the way you feel about my kind. What they've done to you. The anger. I can't even promise I'm not going to hurt you. Also, how can anyone promise this? And in war..."

"But. This thing between us. It must end."

"Nothing is forever."

"You're just saying that. What about death?"

"Even that will pass," he said. "At least for the living."

Anna clung to him, not caring of the stares. "It's been ten years. Yes, the memory of her face is fading and days go by...But pass? I don't know. I think we all carry seeds of death with us. In our memories, our bodies...It's just that sometimes they lie dormant, and then we convince ourselves we're invincible....This war...any war...it's like the spring rain of mortality."

"I know it is hard to believe it," he said. "When the world is in chaos and every small man prophesies doom. A war never lasts for ever. Especially this one."

"That's easy to say." She felt the heat of their bodies touching down their lengths.

"Anna. Listen to me." He scanned his surrounds and then his eyes fixed on hers. "Don't ever repeat what I'm about to tell you. They would shoot me before morning. But...We don't stand a chance. Germany, the Axis. While that little corporal's in charge, anyway. And you must believe me, we've tried..." He ran his tongue along his upper lip. "Let me just say not everyone in Germany supports him. I would be surprised if he makes it to the end of summer. And then...then the generals, they'll sue for peace. This bad dream will soon be over. You've got to trust me."

"And what if you're wrong?"

"All right. Maybe it takes longer. But it will happen. It's inevitable."

"And where does that leave us in the meantime? You'll go back to sea. It's in your blood. I can see it. It's what you do."

He straightened and their breasts pressed together. "Ja. I suppose."

"I've read the statistics, Thomas. *The Times* loves to publish them. Two thirds of submariners in the German navy don't make it. She felt his trouser stiffen against her as he shifted his lips to her other ear. They could whisper now; the sounds about them didn't matter. "Tell me I'm wrong."

"I think it was Freud who said that everyone is defined by an event in their adolescence. You are proof of this, with your mother. Me?" He averted her eyes for a moment. "When I was ten they discovered I had polio. That meant staying home. No physical contact. Even my parents kept their distance." He ran his fingers through her hair, lifted a few strands and let them fall. "Do you know what that feels like? To be an island." He brush kissed her on the cheek, then on the neck. "For eight months. Think about it. That is a lifetime at that age." He ran his eyes down her neck until they stopped at her bosom. "Back in the village there were...stories...that I'd lost both my legs and my arms - a monster, they called me, crippled for life. After I got back even my teachers wouldn't go near me."

"That's awful."

"It is in order..." He looked at his legs. "The only mark of this is that my left leg is half an inch shorter than my right. And even that, I have compensated for, no?"

She smiled. "I'd say."

"So why do I tell you all of this?"

She sighed. "Why do you need a reason for everything?"

"*Nun gut*. I will tell you anyway. I survived, that is what. And I have been surviving ever since. My men say I'm charmed. Except, as you say, sometimes the burden of the living can seem heavier than the promise of death."

Anna realised her eyes were wet now, despite her attempts to dam her distress.

"My dear..." He held her on both upper arms. "I can call you that, can't I? Just this once."

"Anna, look at me. Standing here with you, I am happier than I have ever been. No woman has ever..."

Anna thought of grandmother's warnings. The shallows of a man's passion. Empty pledges. Lies. She realised smoke was burning her lungs and her breathing was shallow and sharp. "Come," she said, relaxing her grip. "Let's go outside, get some air."

"As you like it," he said as they passed the first empty table. "Can I buy you a drink?"

She declined and continued towards the door. The hall had thinned somewhat, away from the bar. Couples and foursomes sat at tables and chairs about the perimeter of the dancefloor with drinks, joking and teasing. Most of the men wore a jacket and tie, but there was little evidence of the three piece suit uniforms of the Mount Nelson. It was an altogether more colourful crowd.

Outside, the bouncer was helping a drunk from the pavement. He handed him to a friend and the two staggered off down the cobbled road. When he saw Anna he tipped his bowler hat and resumed his post at the entrance.

"Where are you going?" Thomas called after her. "It's still early, surely..."

She turned, pointed to the dance floor. "What's the point of this? Us being here. Together. It's just going to make the pain last longer."

He caught up, placed a hand on her shoulder to stop her. "Do not talk like that. Please. We still have time."

"Time?" Her breasts were rising and falling and she felt her lungs wheeze. "You say we have time? I'm not...the sort of girl that can just eat, drink and make merry, you know. When I know it's all about to come crashing down." She pointed with her head through the entrance at a gaggle of women smoking on the pavement. "But if you're looking for one, I'm sure there'll be no shortage of takers."

He followed her outside and onto the street.

She ignored him and held up a hand at an approaching car. The driver wasn't visible and it slid past and around the corner. "Come, Anna, give me credit. I am more than that."

She looked at him. For the first time she imagined his one hip being higher than the other. The thought made him seem vulnerable somehow. "I'm sorry," she said. "I guess I'm tired. It's all been too much for one day."

He took her hand, made no attempt to close the gap between them. "You know..." Far off a bottle shattered on stone followed by a shout. Then the blast of a fog horn. "Every goodbye we say, to anyone, could be the last. War just makes it clearer."

Looking into his eyes she felt her tears welling. Soon he was just a blur against the lamplight. "You may have been charmed, as your crew put it," she said looking down. In the gutter there was a roll of newspaper with a tomato sauce stain and a sludge of potato chips. "Until you met me."

He stepped closer. "Now, now. What are you saying?"

"It's true." Her voice was cracked and thin. "A week ago you were in command of a U-Boat, about to complete yet another successful mission. Who knows, another decoration, a promotion." She looked him up and down. His oversized trousers had a sense of the comic. "Now you're a renegade."

He shifted closer again until there was barely an inch between them. He still held her hand at his thigh. "Renegade? What do you mean?"

Anna felt cold now. There was a breath of wind from up the slope, and the smell of the ocean was strong with a hint of kelp. "There was a detective today," she said. "At lunch."

"Yes?" He tightened his grip on her arm.

Anna shuddered, thought of leaving. The group of girls had drifted back into the hall and in that moment the pavement was empty with no sign of the bouncer.

"You were saying?" He turned her away from the entrance. They were looking down past the café, now deserted. The lights of a tugboat inched off through the harbour blackness.

"You must promise not to tell anyone you heard this from me?"

He nodded.

"The man was a creep. Can you believe he just barged in on Papa and I. Said his name was de Villiers." She thought about his business card in her purse. "I think he operates from the castle. What does that mean?"

The lines about his mouth were pronounced in the half light. "And?"

"They know, Thomas. About the supplies."

His face was a wall.

"Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about. They've even been to Rietvlei to investigate, for goodness' sake."

His eyes narrowed as though he was blowing smoke. "I believe you. Continue."

Fragments of the exchange at the restaurant ran through her mind. Her missing student card being returned. Perhaps she was over thinking the situation. There had been nothing from de Villiers since. "Papa told me afterwards not to worry, they have nothing."

His eyes narrowed further. "You don't agree?"

"Oh...No...I mean there is no specific reason for me to worry. But, I was just thinking...Maybe there was a crate left behind. Something like that. You know, a loose end. No one's perfect."

His eyes relaxed to oval. "How did it end?"

"Ag," She smiled. "Papa threatened to destroy his career, that's all."

Thomas chuckled. "That sounds like Stefan."

They fell silent. Inside the hall the band had struck up again. "But doesn't it worry you?" she said. "The fact that they went to the trouble of driving all the way out to Agulhas. They must know something. Surely"

Thomas paused. A couple stumbled out of the hall and shouted at a passing taxi. After they'd bundled into the car, he said, "Never credit a bureaucrat with too much intelligence."

"It's not only de Villiers that..."

He let her hand go. Stroked his chin with two fingers. "What do you mean?"

"Let's just say others know about you," she said. "That's what I came to tell you. That and goodbye." She threw her arms about him, put her face against his chest. "You must go," she said. "Disappear. Back to your boat, whatever it takes." She drew him closer. "My darling...Sorry. That's silly of me to call you that when we've only known each other a few days." For once she didn't try to disguise her trembling. The weight of having to say what she didn't mean had never felt such a burden. "We're not to see each other again. Not tomorrow. Not ever. Please. You must promise."

"Stop." He ran a finger down a strand of her hair and rested it on her shoulder. "What is this now that you are saying?"

She shuddered his hand free. "Please. Don't...It's too dangerous. You and I. We..." Anna drew back. "O, magtig." She slipped from his grasp. "No. I can't bear this, I..." A taxi appeared from a side street. She waved at it and then willed it to a standstill in front of her. "Goodbye, Thomas." She grabbed at the door handle. At first it wouldn't open. Why did it feel like she was running, taking the easy way out yet again? Only when she was seated did she dare to make eye contact. "Godspeed," she whispered, and blew a kiss.

Chapter 23

Anna stood at the intersection of Hof and Orange Streets and watched the tail lights of the taxi fade around the bend and head towards the city. She was holding the key to her residence in her hand, ready to turn in for the night, but then noticed the light was on and she hesitated. The thought of Elizabeth interrogating her on a failed night out was an anathema. Especially seeing she'd failed in the day, too. And all because she'd lacked the courage to follow through with her resolution.

She looked above the pineapple tops of the palm trees. The moon was bulging over the mane of Lion's Head and only the pointers of the Southern Cross were visible against the milky sky. She sighed, thinking of Willem, and the time they sneaked out to the edge of the vlei to watch the moon rise above the Melkbos. Best friends forever, they'd pledged in the innocence of ignorance. Content with the thrill of being alone together. Could he be looking at the same moon now, despite the thunder of war?

After rounding the pillar on the street corner she paused. Through the hedge she could barely see the outline of the kitchen window. There was no way to tell for sure whether her friend was home. She waited, straining to hear movement. There was nothing. Then a flicker of light streaked the leaves. An engine approached. The familiar putter of diesel. She returned the key to her purse and pressed herself deeper into the shadow of the vegetation.

The truck had stopped diagonally opposite her, beside the entrance to the Gardens. Two men hopped out - one slight, the other a block - and the truck shuddered off. Anna pressed her back against the hedge not daring to move. The men stood still on the pavement until the sound of the truck had purred about the corner and faded. The slighter man turned to scan the road. Just then the headlight of an approaching car caught his face. Anna grabbed at the pillar beside her. There was loose paint and the concrete below it felt cold and bare. The sligheter man was the German.

Who was the other? Thomas was her first thought - but the figure was far too large. Then the two men melted into the shadows of the gardens and the length of Orange Street was empty. All was quiet except for a shiver of wind in the pine tops above her and a fog horn sounding far off.

From behind the hedge came a muffled rattle of a chain and a door opening. "Who is it?" Elizabeth's voice was uncharacteristically cautious. A dog barked a few houses up the street. "Anna? Is that you?"

Anna waited, her back pressed up against the leaves of the Eugenia bush. The smell of its resin was pungent. She re-imagined the man's face. The shadows and streetlight had given him a sepia hue which made his eyes look more sunken, but there was no doubting it was Kurt.

The dog bayed, stopped, bayed again. Elizabeth shouted for it to be quiet. Then the door clapped shut.

Anna reconsidered her options. The sensible thing to do was to retire to bed. It had been a long and emotional day and there was every chance she'd been seeing things. But then she thought of the truck. A farm vehicle, with the German, in Gardens? It was all too much to be coincidence.

She waited for a pair of cars to pass, stepped out from the hedge and crossed the street. The entrance to the gardens was ominous, the row of oaks down each side of Government Avenue bowing toward each other to form a tunnel which was as black as pitch.

She closed her eyes and edged her feet forward over the cobbles. After a dozen foot lengths she slowed and opened her eyes. It was possible to make out shapes now, treetops, buildings - the hump of Lion's Head. Above, the sky appeared grey and backlit by the rising moon.

Then her leg brushed up against something solid. She felt for it with her hands. A bench. She thought of the hobos. She'd often wondered where they slept but never asked. Were they, too, afraid of the dark?

Her eyes had adjusted now and she could see form and depth so she walked with growing confidence down the avenue. The first landmarks she recognised were the sleeping lions at the entrance to her Michaelis campus and the arch of the Little Theatre where she paused to catch her breath. Just then there was a rustle in the agapanthus bed which frightened her momentarily but after that the only sound was the trickle of the stream running in the ditch beside her.

Further, the branches above her thinned and she could make out the slab of Table Mountain. Was there anywhere in the city to escape its presence? Depending on her mood it could be either a comfort or a menace. A hundred yards off across a pond and open lawn rose the pillars of the National Gallery, luminous white against the base of Devil's Peak. Then the trees closed the roof of avenue again. Hemmed now by a wrought iron fence on either side, it seemed darker, even, than before.

She ran her hand along the left fence paling for direction in lieu of light, only stopping when it came up against the post. Somewhere a dove cooed and a song of crickets started. There was no need to read the embossing on the gate to know it was the entrance to the rose garden. Inside, the trees made way for a clearing scented and luminous with icebergs. Anna followed the path along the near length, parallel to the Avenue until it plunged again into the darkness of vegetation.

She paused for her eyes to adjust again. It was possible to make out a stand of palm stalks to one side and a bamboo thicket on the other and a branch crossing above her with a beard of roots. The air felt warmer and closer somehow, as if in a jungle. After a couple of minutes the jungle cleared. To her right and she could make out Government House with its Victorian balcony and lead-paned windows beyond the fence. The lights were on and she imagined the Governor General in his study. Losing sleep over the affairs of state.

Then she heard them. Voices ahead in the dark; too far to make out words. Then drowned by the baa baa of a fog horn from somewhere in the bay. She stop-started forward, conscious of every crushed leaf and twig breaking underfoot. Soon she was passing through a jungle of cycads and bananas, and drooping branches.

At first Anna ignored it. Then she saw the flicker of light ahead and to her left through the leaves of a hedge. She stepped off the path and onto the lawn, shuffling toward a New Zealand Christmas Tree. Its bearded trunk ran low and parallel to the ground for several yards before rising through the shrubbery. Soon only a waist high hedge of hydrangea was between her and the light. She dropped to her knees and crept the last few feet.

Anna could hear her heart beating, the wheeze of her chest. Through the greenery, in a clearing, she could see the stone wall that she knew was the well. Perched on its lip was a paraffin lamp which hissed at a moth. Its light reflected off the folds of an Indian Rubber tree's trunk to form a mangled set of organ pipes.

The voices started up again, faint at first but growing clearer. Then a scuffle and its echo. She waited, not daring to move. The forms of the two men, one like a giant, appeared from behind a fold of the rubber tree. Their faces were a blur against the lamplight.

“Jissis, maar die goet is swaar,” the larger man said. A crate dropped to the ground with a thud.

“Pass auf,” the other said. “This is dangerous.”

The larger man sat on the crate and padded his top pocket. He stuffed a cigarette in his mouth and struck a match on his trouser leg. When the end of his smoke glowed red he flicked the match to one side.

The German stepped forward and pulled the cigarette out of the giant’s mouth. “This is not permitted.” He crushed it underfoot then nodded at the crate. “Do you want to kill us both?”

The giant sprang up, grabbed the German by his shirt collar and lifted him to tip toes. “Luister hier, moer. Don’t think you can stand there giving orders while I do all the hard work.” After several seconds he let him go. Then he stooped for the cigarette butt, shook it of dust and returned it to his pocket. “Anyway, what happened to your boss? A man could at least reason with him.”

The German straightened his shirt front. “I have told you before: I do not report to Korvettenkapitän von Eisenheim.”

“Ge. Now you’re really yanking my chain. He’s supposed to be in command of the whole submarine.”

Anna tensed. Were they talking about Thomas? There was no other explanation. A scratch was growing in her throat and she swallowed. Nothing was making sense.

“This is complicated,” Kurt said. “I am with the Abwehr. We take our orders direct from Berlin.”

“Ja, that doesn’t surprise me. You’re a glorified office boy. Letting the real men do the dirty work. I bet you’ve never experienced a real fight.” He kicked at a root. “Leaches, all of you.”

Crickets started up from the bamboo thicket. Anna looked at the stars. Even the pointers to the Southern Cross had been subsumed by the moonlight. She felt the slime of a snail on her ankle but didn’t dare to reach for it.

“Where’s the bugger been, anyway?” the giant said. “Wasn’t he supposed to be helping last night already?”

“Attention,” Kurt stepped over to the well and looked down. “Von Eisenheim has disappeared.” He felt for a ladder and rattle-tested it. Then he walked back to the crate and tugged. “Come. Help me.”

The giant leaned his weight to move the crate. “What do you mean he’s disappeared?” he said. “You’re supposed to be working together, not so?”

“That is correct.” Kurt stood and waited for the giant to shift the crate to the well. “He told me he had to get the engine repairs done. And spare parts. But that is the problem. He hasn’t reported to central command since Sunday.”

“So what are you going to do? Doesn’t your escape plan depend on the U-boat?”

Kurt pointed at the ladder and waited for the giant to lower himself waist high into the well. “If our mission is successful there will be no need for escape.”

"Ja, but you told me before, that the Fuhrer wants it to look like the Afrikaners are working alone."

"This is true. Listen. You do not have to worry. I will find von Eisenheim. You just—"

"And what happens if you don't? What then?"

Kurt shoved at the crate. It scraped over the stone ledge until it reached its fulcrum and began to tilt. He guided it to the giant's waiting hands. "This is not a problem. I have communications with his deputy, Leutnant Fischer. He is an able commander in his own right. And *his* loyalties at least are in the right place. No, by the time anything has happened I'll be sipping schnapps in the wardroom half way to Lourenco Marques."

"Coward." The giant leaned his elbow on the wall and waited.

"What is wrong?"

"Nothing. I just need a rest. And I was thinking..."

"That is good. I did not think you did much of that kind of thing."

"Fok jou." The giant spat on the ground.

"Sorry. I interrupted you."

"No, it's just I was thinking: you know that light back there, the one I showed you at Tuynhuis? Jissis, it's close to midnight and that Smuts okie is still in his study can you believe it?"

"Yes. And why is this important?"

"It's nothing. Just that I was reading the other day, *Commando*, the story by Denys Reitz about his experience in the Vryheidsoorlog. You know he rode with Smuts. All round the country. Heroes, I tell you. Can you believe they got almost all the way to Bellville?" He pointed north across the well.

"Anyway, they could see the lights of Cape Town." He wiped spittle from his beard. "Why do I tell you this? Because Reitz says, even then Smuts was a loner. Couldn't be bothered to stay at the kampvuur with the manne. No, instead he went back to his tent to read. Can you believe that? Not just the bible. No, that wasn't good enough for him. All sorts of philosophy too. Even poetry."

"Is this why you hate him so much?"

"You think I'm stupid? No, something happened to the bugger. After the peace at Vereeniging, I mean. He became...how can I say it? English." He spat into the well. "No, don't look at me like that, it's true. Since then he's spent more time running around overseas gatkruiping the king than he has at home. It's like he's in love with everything British."

"That's what they do," Kurt said. "Seduce their enemies with words. Mein Gott, some of our best men have been turned. And Churchill...He's the best."

"That Goebels okie of yours doesn't do too badly either."

"Perhaps." Kurt looked at his watch and then back past the tree. "We must go faster. There are three more."

Anna watched the German's head sink below the wall and waited for the scraping to fade. When all that was left was the lamp sighing to a zing of insects she reached down, and flicked the snail from her ankle. After what must have been several minutes, she crawled out of the hedge, ducked under the beard of the Christmas tree's trunk and stepped into the clearing.

She was replaying snippets of the conversation as she approached the well but they made no sense. The only thing she could be fairly certain of was that Thomas was in some kind of trouble. But what? And did he know? Just then a cloud passed overhead, shutting out the starlight. She reached her hand over the rim of the well and ran it about the inside diameter. The stone bricks were smooth and damp. The first thing to hit her when she braved a peek over the edge was the reek of urine.

Without thinking she removed her shoes, hitched her dress, and stepped onto the ledge. The ladder was still there so she turned around and started to lower herself rung by rung. Only when her eyes were level with the ledge did she hear the sloshing from below and she froze. The stench of rot and urine made brought her to the brink of gagging. From somewhere below there was a splashing, nearer now, above the gurgle of the stream. And then a light flickered against the slate.

Without thinking Anna clambered up, skipping rungs. Not caring for noise, she threw her body over the wall. The stones on the clearing were smooth and her only thought was not to slip. Moments later she was through the hedge, branches cracking. A thorn ripped across her forearm, but she wasn't feeling. The self-recrimination and analysis would follow in due time. There was only one thing to do now, and that was to get away.

Chapter 24

By five-thirty it was light enough to read a newspaper outside, and the swallows were chirping full throttle. Still in a daze, Anna leaned her elbows on the kitchen windowsill and stared through the fronds to the rock sandwich of Table Mountain which was aglow from the yet-to-rise sun. It had been a rough night.

After nodding off on the third page of *Death in the Library*, she'd woken in at four in the morning. Lying in the gloom her spirit had been in turmoil. First it was just an ill-defined dread tinged with betrayal. Then a fear of someone close to her dying in battle. Yet as far as she knew her loved ones were safe: Papa and her brothers weren't in the service; and of Willem, no news was good news. Only when she got up to open the window did she put her finger on it. 'If our mission is successful', the German had said, 'there will be no need for escape'. Did Thomas know? Should she try to warn him? Tossing and turning in the darkness, she traded feelings of guilt and regret. By the time she'd swung her legs out of bed she felt as though no act of will was going to get her through the day.

She was looking in the direction of the stove. The pot hissed to the boil and water bubbled down the enamel leaving a wake of chicory flecks. She dipped the ladle into the brew, lifted it and blew steam. The aroma of Rietvlei's kitchen filled her lungs. She closed her eyes and sipped. It was bitter coffee, but a comfort.

"I'll be damned if it isn't Princess Anna herself."

Anna swallowed, felt the liquid scald her throat. In the fog of morning she'd forgotten about Elizabeth. "Ag..." She took a cloth and dabbed at the coffee stain on the front of her dress. "You know me: early to bed, early to rise, makes a woman healthy, wealthy and wise."

"Oh, stop that. You're making me feel guilty about my sloth already. Don't worry, we'll get the farm girl out of you yet."

"I didn't mean to wake you." Anna looked at the pot. "Sorry, I tried to be quiet." She pointed at the radio. "At least I've resisted that temptation. Until now, anyway. Won't you..."

"Woah." Elizabeth wagged her fingernail like a windscreen wiper. "Mercy, girl. Some of us had a drink or two last night." She was still in her night dress and as she stepped closer her breasts wobbled. A smear of lipstick was still visible on the side of her mouth. "So..." She dipped her pinkie nail in the coffee, and withdrew it. "We missed you. What happened?"

"Oh, nothing. I just didn't feel up to it. You wouldn't believe how far I walked yesterday." Then she picked up the pot and poured the steaming black liquid into a mug. "Care for some?"

Elizabeth soured her face at the pot. "That stuff? I've no idea how you people can like such a witch's brew. What do you call it again?"

"Moerkoffie."

She took a mug off the shelf and placed a teabag in it. There was a love kiss on the base of her neck.

"Before I forget: your father was looking for you." She kept her eyes on Anna. "Called twice."

"And? Anna placed her mug on the table, reached for the sugar bowl. She scraped the teaspoon around, first clockwise, then the other way. "What did he want?"

"Didn't say. He sounded agitated though. Like he really wanted to speak to you."

"No message?"

"Not really." Elizabeth twirled a strand of hair at her shoulder. "Hang on. Oh, yes. The second time he said to join him at breakfast. Eight-thirty. That you'd know the place."

Anna clenched her lips, then relaxed them. Since yesterday's lunch her mind had been telling her never to see him again. But her heart always seemed to win. It was infuriating.

Elizabeth plucked the teabag from her mug and pointed at the pot. "Sorry, I've changed my mind. Could do with a kicker to get going."

Anna hesitated. "I thought you'd want to go back to sleep." There was a pause. "Sorry to say, but looks like you need it."

"Oooh," Elizabeth drew back. "Catty today are we: something happen last night?" Her eyes narrowed as if to cigarette smoke. "A lover's tiff, perhaps?"

Anna brushed past her and stopped at the wireless. She switched it on and tuned the volume dial. There was a crackling and she adjusted the tuning nob until it found a frequency. An advertising ditty was playing. Something about a new device to wash clothes.

"You saw him again, didn't you?" The corners of Elizabeth's mouth cracked a fraction.

Anna continued to fiddle with the dial. When she found the BBC she stooped to listen.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of, my dear." Elizabeth filled her mug. "He's gorgeous."

"Leave it."

Elizabeth laughed. "Sure. Just tell me one thing and I'll stop." She put her mug down, eyed Anna. "Did you do it?"

"What do you mean? You know I don't..."

"Heavens no, of course not. Not our Anna, waiting for Prince Charming to live happily ever after with. I meant, did you kiss him, silly."

Anna felt her cheeks warm.

"Oh, Lordy," Elizabeth said. "You don't say." She picked at her nightgown at her chest. Watched the heave and fall of her breast. "If you're not going to make a move, for goodness' sake, give me a chance."

Anna's embarrassment had made way for the guilt of the night before, just stronger. She wondered how she was going to stop from crying.

"Lord, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..." Elizabeth put an arm about her. "I was just teasing. You know me..."

Anna sniffed, found her head resting against her friend's.

"Oh, my dear, you know you can talk to me, anytime. Trust me, I know what it's like to have your heart broken. Men. Really. They are the pits."

Anna shook her head, averted her eyes. She had an overwhelming need in that moment to tell somebody, anybody, even if just in part. "I've made a terrible mistake," she said. "I'm a dreadful..."

"Now, now, my dear. Don't blame yourself. That's what we girls do, you know. It's not right."

"No. It's not that." Anna looked at her, not caring for the tears. "Elizabeth: what would you do if you think the man you love is in great danger and you've done nothing to help him? Nothing except cut him off." She let her face fall on her friend's neck. "I told him not to ever contact me again. Can you believe it? And I tell myself I love him. That doesn't make sense, does it? Besides, I've never come close to truly loving a man." She had her face turned to the window. It looked like it was raining on the mountain and yet the sun was shining. A monkey's wedding. "I just don't know, I feel so wonderful when I'm with him. We talk and talk and never run out of things...And when he holds me...I don't know...Something happens."

"It's all right. It's all right." Elizabeth placed her hands on Anna's shoulders, insisting on eye contact. "Listen up, girl. You'll get over him. You've got to believe me."

Anna shook her head. "No. It's not that. He really is in danger. They...his own people...they're going to let him...There's just no way he can run forever."

"What are you talking about?" Elizabeth looked confused. "Who's running? From whom?"

Anna looked at her feet.

"My dear, how am I going to help you if you don't tell me anything?" Don't you trust me? I was just joking earlier. I wouldn't dare try to take him from you. Wouldn't stand a chance, anyhow. I mean look at you." She closed a fold of satin over her cleavage. "I'm not even in the same league. Really."

"Oh, you're just saying that." Anna smiled and it felt a comfort. Then she shivered. "It's not just him that's in trouble. I can't be sure yet, but if it's what I think it is, then a whole lot of people could get hurt. Including Papa."

Elizabeth stared. Her hands were on her hips, her fingers pressing into a fold of flesh beneath her gown. "My dear girl. I have no idea what you're talking about. But if you know people's lives are in danger, you've got to do the right thing. You really—"

"It's not so simple. You have to believe me. If I told the police it would only make matters worse for them. Oh, how can I explain? This is dreadful."

Elizabeth pulled the cord about her waist. The hourglass effect was flattering. She said, "Well, I've said my say. I think—"

"Sssh," Anna stooped to the wireless. A newsreader was giving a monologue. Something about Japanese advances across Singapore Island and heavy bombing. Then the broadcast switched to a reporter who read a despatch from the front lines. It was Allied Supreme Commander Wavell to Arthur Percival of the British 18th Division. A rant on the future of the empire depending on them to repulse the yellow horde. And the imperative to fight to the end.

Fight? It was as if a sluice gate inside had lifted and Anna felt a surge of guilt. She thought of the island garrison, of the rubble, the bodies, left to decompose in Asian streets for fear of bombs. Of men suffering in the jungle, others at sea, or a frozen steppe, staring at death every day. And all she was doing was vacillating between two stools, or crumpling at the smallest of setbacks. It was pathetic. What was she so afraid of, after all? She flicked the wireless off in mid-sentence.

"Excuse me," she said, straightening. "I'm going for a walk."

"As you like it." Elizabeth stepped back and pointed at the table. A torch lay next to a rain jacket. "What's that for?"

"Oh, you know Cape Town. You never can be sure." Anna took the torch and jacket, clutched them to her breast, and marched to the door. "Why don't you get back to bed?"

Outside, the air was fresh and clean. From where she stood on the street corner, Anna could see past the rooftops of office buildings to the still cold sun silhouetting the Hottentots Holland Mountains. There was no traffic yet on Orange Street so she crossed to the Gardens. Government Avenue was deserted as far as she could make out under the tunnel of branches so she started off, hugging the side of the path. To her right she could make out the grounds of Cape Town High School, still barred. On her right, just past Michaelis, a poster advertising the theatre.

The roses were still drenched in dew and clumps of mist still lingered in the clearings as she wound down the same path she'd been on just hours before. Initially she could make out the red and white brickwork of Parliament across the way from the Avenue as it flickered through the vegetation. After the rose garden the path meandered into the jungle, banana trees and date palms leaning in over lawns. A couple of minutes later the menagerie appeared before her and next to it a whitewashed arch with the slave bell. The birds weren't singing yet, and the only life she could make out was a few budgies clawing at the mesh.

The area about the well was deserted. Anna leaned over the lip. First she shivered at the cold of the stone against her dress, then tensed. The ladder was gone. She cast around. Nothing. She put the torch down. What to do? Leaning over again, she peered into the gloom. The grating was back in place but she could make out fresh metal at the hinge. She looked at her watch. Six-forty. Assuming an hour and a half to get back, change and return for breakfast by eight-forty-five, there was less than an hour to spare. It was risky but there was no shrinking now. She clenched the torch between her teeth, worked herself over the ledge.

Anna suppressed a gag at the stench of urine and crouched in the half-dark. Without looking she pushed her hand down into the rubbish until her fingers found the grating below. At the first tug there was no movement so she shifted her grip. The metal was moist and cold. Another tug but nothing. At the fourth attempt there was a grist of iron on iron and then it swung open and bits of rubbish disappeared below. She shone the torch into the hole. Water pooled into the well from the side closest to the mountain and was clear and fast-flowing.

The voices must have been close by for her to hear them above the swirling. She guessed they were approaching the well from the same direction she had. Acting on instinct she dropped to her haunches, switched the torch off and lowered the grating over her head.

"Where's the bleddy ladder now?"

Even in the echo, Anna was sure it was the giant from the night before. She felt water lapping at the soles of Anna's shoes. And a creeping chill.

"You should not be asking this question." It was Kurt.

Anna tensed.

"The instructions were clear."

“Ja, but nobody was going to find it last night. The gardens are closed to the public. I keep telling you that, doos.”

The voices grew clearer. Anna pressed her face against the grating. The circle of sky and leaves above the well was the most beautiful thing she could have seen in that moment and she thought how colourful and clear it all was and how foolish she was to be in this cesspit.

“Wat die donder...”

The voice sounded directly overhead. Without thinking she backed into the tunnel, feet splayed up the sides. The stream below gurgled into the dark.

“Ag, you know what. I’m not worried. The gardeners are the only people who could have been here last night. They’ve probably stacked it somewhere. I’ll—”

“Shut up.” The German’s voice rang around the well. “And look down there.”

Anna’s thighs were aching but she dared not budge.

“Ja? Some shit paper. So what?”

“Also. Look carefully.”

“All right. You tell me, clever bastard.”

“The grating, you idiot.”

“What about it?”

“Do you see how clean it is? Ignore the paper. Do you not see there are no leaves? This is impossible.”

“Ag, come on, I haven’t got time for this bullshit. You see the water coming out that pipe there? Guess what? It washes things away.”

“I talk about what is above the grate, stupid. Last night I left it covered for camouflage. Now there is nothing there.”

“You people are a pain in the arse, you know that? I bet my oupa’s ox wagon you’re seeing things. Everything’s fine, man. Let’s go. I need breakfast.”

“Überhaupt keine chance. These are my orders.”

“You can stick your orders up your German arse.”

“Also, it is not necessary to insult my people like this. We are helping you, no?”

The giant spat. It plopped into the stream just inches from Anna’s nose. “I’ll better keep my mouth shut.”

“*Nun gut*. You stay here at this well. If there is someone down there, they will have to come out. Then you will know what to do, *order nicht?*”

“And you? Where are you bugging off to - while I have to sit here like a mamparra?”

“I will go to the other entrance. Do not move until I return. This is an order.”

There were other voices now, getting louder. Kurt exchanged pleasantries with someone and there was silence.

Anna's feet were submerged now and her back pressed hard up against the brick arch. She was finding it hard to think clearly above a surge in the stream. Returning up the well now was suicide. And staying cramped without a sound would be impossible. There was only one thing to do: find another way out. She stared down the tunnel, felt her pulse at the jugular. Three heartbeats to the count. It was going to have to be mind over muscle.

Still with the torch off, she shuffled a few feet downstream in a crouch. A cobweb brushed over her face and she paused to pick it off with her fingers. Desperate to straighten, she ran her palm along the slime of the arch. There was no let up. She switched on the torch and panned the brick of the tunnel. A cockroach scurried over the funnel of light, sweeping circles with its antennae. Anna shifted her focus to the floor. The water was clear and looked to be about eight inches deep. She stepped into the stream.

Straightening her shoulders, Anna was able to establish a rhythm of sloshing and crouching. Soon the light from the well had faded and her only guides were the crescents of torchlight wiper-blading ahead. How much further before a storm water drain? But what if there weren't any? She thought back to the history she'd read of the grachts. This tunnel would once have been the Heerengracht, Adderley Street's other name. Like the others, it must eventually drain into the harbour. But with the reclamation of the foreshore underway, there was any guessing how far that would be. She felt a wave of nausea. Could she last that long?

Just then the brick on the right side of the tunnel melted to black. She stopped, her breathing shallow. The air was getting warmer and close and even in the damp of the tunnel she could tell she was sweating. The torch probed the void. It was another tunnel, this one rectangular and dry. Before entering, she glanced back along the way she'd come. There was a gradual curve into the distance and only a suggestion of the well's light. How far had she come? Thirty yards, fifty? She guessed she was somewhere below the Wale Street entrance to the Company's Gardens now.

Anna hesitated, not sure whether to turn. If she continued down with the stream as far as the top of Adderley Street there must at least be a chance of a drain to exit from. But that would be another hundred yards or more and her back was aching. The side tunnel on the other hand, would cross Government Avenue within a child's catty shot. More possible options for escape. But she thought back to her school outings to De Mond's caves. The teachers' warnings of taking a tributary too many underground. She looked back and forth. Where to for guidance? It was hard to imagine a higher power in a place as Godforsaken as a sewer.

She decided to hedge her bets. Finding a stone in the stream, she scratched an arrow on the wall and stepped into the void of the side tunnel. Her first thought upon entering was relief. The tunnel was high enough to straighten. She waited for the water to drain from her shoes and set off. After twenty paces there was a trickle of light from above. It was coming from a shaft which was topped by a grating. A shadow passed over from one direction and then another. Probably pedestrians. She looked about for something to stand on. Only water and silt. Her head dropped in anguish. She tested her voice to shout but then thought of the German. *I will test the other entrance*, he'd said. She shut her eyes in despair.

When she opened them again, the tunnel appeared to have more light. She noticed something on the floor and crouched to inspect. It was a series of striations, recently made. She followed the dashes beyond the range of torchlight. After thirty two steps she intersected another tunnel. The

marks continued across it. A smell was in the tunnel now, strangely sweet and stronger with every step. It reminded her of something but she struggled to name it. Another twenty had passed since the cross tunnel. Or was it thirty? The buildings of Parliament must be overhead now. What chance was there of an exit?

Ahead in the shadows was a rustle. She killed the torch. At first the dark made it impossible to see her hand. Then the rustle again, closer and on the floor. She flicked the torch on again and stabbed it at the sound, first right then left. It was an opening in the wall, rectangular, no telling, at first, how deep. She took a step forward, then another.

A squeal at her feet shattered the silence. With the force of retracting her shoe the torch fell with a crack and faded. She stooped, fumbling. The floor was smooth, almost oily. She found the torch flush with the wall, then it was shaking in her hand. There was no response to the switch. She banged the back end on her palm and tried again.

The first to catch the light were its eyes, bulging and insolent. It was a rat, poised on its haunches. Anna stamped. The rat quivered its whiskers but held its ground. She stepped closer, stamped again. It was an effort to keep her breathing even. At last the rat lowered itself, turned and slinked into the shadows.

The room was the width and length of Rietvlei's storeroom, just shallower. Its air was dank but cooler than in the tunnel. The sickly odour she'd noticed on the passage, was stronger now. Like overripe bananas. Anna ran the light along the apex of the ceiling's arch. At the far end there were squiggles of graffiti. 'Johannes. Dirk. 1801', she was able to decipher after crossing the room. Had they been prisoners? Then she saw stairs. They led to the outline of a trapdoor. She ran her palms about the underside of wood and iron ribbing.

Just then there was a shuffling sound. It was impossible to tell which side of the tunnel it had come from. Could someone have followed? She thought of running for the door. But just then there was the echo. A voice. What was left to do?

Her fingers ran up against a padlock. Hopeful, she pried at it. Nothing, just rust flakes settling on her cheeks. She placed both palms on the underside of the trapdoor and shoved. The door lifted a fraction. Through the crack she saw a row of filing cabinets. It could be the archives of the Library of Parliament, perhaps even the basement of the General Assembly. She turned around and positioned her shoulder blades against the wood and tried to straighten. The door lifted a fraction further but then jolted at the padlock. After the third attempt she stopped to wipe her face. There was no escape.

The voices were clearer now but still unidentifiable. Anna's mind spun the possibilities. Could it be the German? 'I will go to the other entrance,' he'd said earlier. And if not him, then who would be traipsing about under the city? The space in the room felt smaller with every passing second.

"That's a hundred and twenty."

Anna clamped her breath. An accent ricocheted from her past, of the lands. Impossible. It was Fanus. She stabbed the light about at random. It picked out a step in the far wall, waist-high and running end-to-end. She tip toed over and felt the top surface. It was a tarpaulin.

"A moment please..."

Anna exhaled through her teeth. The German had found her.

"...According to my calculations it is one hundred and twenty-seven." The voices were near the entrance. There was a clunk on the stone and the distance trickle of a stream.

"Ag, you bureaucrat. It's hundred and twenty. I can't help it you have such short legs."

"Our orders are to be precise. It will not help to insult me."

"Hoor hier. You stick to what you do best – like covering your arse. I'll deal with the fireworks."

Anna felt the weight of the city pressing down on the ceiling and the room seemed to shrink. She lifted the edge of the tarpaulin. There was nothing else to do. She squeezed underneath and lay lengthways, her back against a row of crates. The air was warm and the smell of bananas was strong now and tinged with oil.

"Here," Fanus said. "Hold this."

From the footsteps Anna was sure he was through the doorway, approaching. The tarpaulin flattened her nose and drooped over her mouth and in the stale oily air she had an urge to vomit.

"And pass me the end...No, other one, doos."

"This is enough." There was a click of a heel on stone. "You will speak to me with respect."

Anna felt an itch form in her sinus, resolved to contain it.

"Respect is earned. Just like trust."

"You forget that we are not obliged to help your organisation. All of this place, this country...is no longer so important to Germany."

"Nonsense. Just ask the British why they sent just about their whole army here for the Vryheidsoorlog. And the Dutch before them. Jissis, even the Portuguese..."

Anna felt dust gathering at the back of her throat. The oxygen under the tarpaulin was depleting.

"You forget one thing, order."

"And what's that, smart arse?"

"Japan. They're with us now. The Cape...It is no longer so important for Germany to be here."

"Really? I would have thought the opposite. You being cosy with the Japs now means more trade not less. And with Rommel stuck up North, the Suez doesn't look like opening any time soon."

"I did not say the Cape was unimportant. Just that it will no longer be Germany's responsibility alone."

Anna could hear Fanus' breathing in the silence. It always got heavy when he was angry. "Are you trying to tell me you're going to through us to the yell dogs?" He was almost shouting. "Why the hell are you here then?"

"This is simple. Germany is loyal to her friends."

"Ge. Tell that to Stalin."

"That was different. It was—"

The urge to sneeze rose quickly and Anna battled to swallow it.

“Hey.” Fanus’ voice was close and clear. Anna could hear his breathing. Then a cuffing of a toe heel on the tarpaulin. “What was that?”

The only sound for several seconds was the sloshing far off. Then there was a scratching on stone and another pause.

“So,” the German said at length. “You scare for a mouse.”

“Luister hier.” Fanus’s voice reverberated. Then there was a scuffle, more breathing. “You calling me a coward?”

“You will put me down immediately.”

“Really. And if I don’t?”

“I will report you to your high command.”

“That’s funny,” Fanus said. “Considering that I am the high command.”

The German cleared his throat. “Perhaps. But if I put in a bad report when this operation is finished, this will not happen. You are aware of this, I know. Now let me go.” There were shoes on stone.

“Thank you.” Then a padding on cloth. “That is better. Now. Continue.”

For a moment there was only Fanus’ breathing. Then the whine of a reel and a rustle approaching along the floor. It was quiet again, then another scuff.

“Right, we’re done here. Let’s go.”

“Ein moment. We must connect this?”

“Listen: I’m the expert. In fact, you’d better show me a bit of respect: I’m all you’ve got.”

“Incorrect. We have Thomas.”

“Really? I heard he’s got himself lost.”

Anna felt like shifting but resisted. She’d be still so long she couldn’t feel her extremities. In the silence she worried that her heartbeat was audible.

“Ah. Who gave you that information?”

They fell to silence. There was a dripping Anna hadn’t heard before from the tunnel. “That’s my business. Where do you think he’s got to, anyway?”

“He is making repairs for the U-boat.”

“Jinne, I thought you people were so good at organising things. You telling me you don’t even know which machine shop he went to?”

“Of course. Have you heard of Paschen Engineering?”

“So you know? Why don’t you just call him then?”

“It is complicated.” Kurt sniffled. “The owner told us they finished the cylinder boring yesterday at eleven am. That he came for it. Since then, we have not heard from him.”

“And you still trust him? Thomas, I mean?”

“Ja, sicher. Korvettenkapitän von Eisenheim is one of our most decorated U-boat commanders. You must not be concerned.” Kurt cleared his throat. “We will find him, we—”

“And if you don’t?”

There was a pause; the only sound was the faraway trickle.

“We have procedures.”

Anna stopped breathing. Her shoulders felt like knots.

“Ge. I say we do something about him now.”

“Nein. This assignment is bigger than one person.” His shoe scraped the ground and clicked closer.

“In any case, none of this will be necessary if your people win the vote tomorrow.”

“Fat chance. Malan’s a dreamer.”

“That is not what the girl’s father said.”

“You mean van der Vliet? Don’t believe him. You know he was married to an English woman, hey? Fence sitter.”

“This is strange? He gives his farm—?”

“Ja, ja. I’m not saying his heart isn’t in the right place. It’s just that his methods. He thinks this...this Parliament is the answer for everything.” There was a thud of spittle against the tarpaulin.

“Come. We’re wasting our time here.”

Anna waited for the footsteps to be swallowed by the echoes in the tunnel and then rolled out from under the tarpaulin and stood, sucking air. After throwing the canvas over on itself, she switched on the torch. There were two rows of crates, stacked three high. She felt the nearest latch. There was no lock so she lifted.

The banana smell that hit her was pungent and she trained the torch light to its source. Inside, it was stacked with oversized cigars. She ran her hand over the top row. It felt oily and soft. Then she remembered where she’d smelled the bananas before. It had been a few years back when her father and Kleinjan were building a road through the kloof. Koos Prinsloo had also been there. Her heart throbbed at her neck. It must be dynamite.

She only remembered details of her flight much later. Like the wire that caught at her feet as she made for the entrance. And turning left for no good reason, then left again and right. Not stopping to think which way the others had gone, that there was no other escape the way she’d come. At last, out of breath, she slowed. There was a half-moon of light ahead. Craning her neck, she could make out a manhole, way above at the end of a shaft. And a ladder, out of reach. Then the manhole cover was shifting, iron grating iron, and a call.

It was impossible to tell how long or far she’d been running before she stumbled. Her first thought on her falling was exhaustion. But as she sank to her waist she realised that the floor of the tunnel had given way to a pool. She flailed her arms on the surface of the water until her feet settled on a bed of pebbles. The torch was gone and it took a while for her eyes to adjust to the light. The water about her was clear and sweet and she lowered her face to the surface and drank with abandon.

Anna crawled out of the depression and stood, kicking at a crab that had pinched her ankle. Her dress was soaked and clung to her body but she felt warm. The incessant gurgling of the stream was oppressive now, her only thoughts of escape. Continue downstream or back? There seemed to be no right or wrong in this dungeon, just a sameness of gloom so she waded on.

At length the tunnel grew and she was able to stretch tall. The air was fresher now, and flowing onto her face from downstream. Then, as the tunnel rounded a gradual bend, there was a waft of cold on her neck. She looked up and ahead. There was a riser in the ceiling of the tunnel and the light from it was diffused. At chest height she noticed the first rung of a ladder. Not daring to hope, she climbed. At the end of ladder was a shelf and beyond that a vertical manhole cover. She put her backside against it, wedged her feet behind the ladder and heaved.

The cover fell outwards with a clang and air and light flooded into the tunnel. After wiggling through the opening on her hands and knees, Anna found herself on a patch of grass and weeds. The sun was directly ahead, well proud of the skyline, and - though blinding at first - it was marvellous. There was a waft of soot mingled with petrol in the air, and now and again the vroom of a car passing. She knew instinctively was Strand Street, the railway line straight ahead and beyond it the foreshore's rubble. She didn't have to turn to know what was towering behind her.

Chapter 25

From close-up the castle's rampart seemed higher and the Union Jack above was a slither in the calm. Anna pressed herself against the stone which was already warm from the morning sun. The nightmare of the tunnels was fading but the demands of her day ahead had begun to intrude her consciousness in starts. As she moved along the wall she ran a finger between the slate bricks causing bits of shell and lime to crumble to the grass below.

She was worrying even before she rounded the Leerdam corner and saw the clock at the entrance. Twenty past eight: she was already late and it would be another fifteen minutes to the restaurant by foot. Her father would be fuming. There certainly wasn't time to go back to the residence and change. She shuffled to the edge of the moat and peered over the ballustrade. The water was polluted and stagnant, its only wrinkle from the mouth of a carp. The bedraggled reflection startled her: still wet, her dress clung to her legs, and there were splotches of mud everywhere. No matter, it would have to do.

As she followed the now familiar trail of palms along the edge of the Parade, she fretted over the looming encounter with her father. Should she tell him what she'd discovered in the tunnels? The explosives were, in all likelihood, positioned directly below the General Assembly. The consequences of doing nothing were too ghastly to contemplate. Surely he'd tell the authorities - even though it if it meant risking his foster sister's life. And Thomas'.

The Sailor's Eye was just off a corner of Church Square facing the statue of Onze Jan, its signage obscured by the curlicue wrought iron of an external balcony. Anna paused under the neon light above the entrance. The only resolution she'd come to was to stall for time.

Inside it was dark and wood-panelled, with a series of booths and plastic seats. The sort of place that oozes masculinity. Her father sat staring out the window, a cigarette and coffee in his left and a pen in the other. When he saw her reflection he turned. The whites of his eyes broadened as he glared at her over his reading glasses. At last he placed his pen across the sheaf of paper in front of him and straightened.

"What the hell happened to you?"

She tousled her hair. "Just showered, that's all."

'And the mud? You look like you used to after playing with the klonkies.'

"Ag..." She laughed to disguise her anger, then clutched her knee. "Just a bit of eina. That ditch they're digging along the avenue. You know how clumsy I can be. It must have been the dew."

"Please." He pointed at the seat opposite, picked up his pen and flattened the bottom half of his page. "I just have to sign this motion."

"Attending to matters of national importance at breakfast?" She forced a smile. Already thinking it was a mistake to have accepted his invitation. "Do you ever rest?"

"Sorry." He put the pen down, shoved the papers to one side. "There's always so much to do. And never enough time. Don't you feel like that sometimes?"

"As a matter of fact, no."

"Listen, Engel. I was meaning to apologise for yesterday. You know, Margriet and me...Maybe I shouldn't have invited her along after all. It must be difficult for you. It's just that it's all...so new."

Anna was about to leave. He was bound to ferret out more information than she was ready to give.

"Go on, sit," he said, pointing at the seat again. "You're making me nervous."

Anna found herself sliding into the booth. "So," she said, "What's going down in the halls of power today?"

"Quiet day, thank the Lord. Just some debates on terms of trade, that sort of thing."

She pointed at the document. "So why the haste?"

"Ag, you know how I like to be prepared." His dimples deepened in lieu of a smile. "Tomorrow's a big day."

"Oh, why so?"

He leaned forward, voice a husk. "This is strictly confidential. Right?"

Anna tensed. She picked up a menu. "Listen. I may disagree with your views. But that doesn't make me a skinnerbek."

"I know, I know." He waved at a waiter. "Come, let's order first."

The waiter smiled a fraction longer than necessary. Anna looked away, then pointed at the scrambled egg on toast and coffee special on the menu. Her father asked for poached eggs on white toast, and sausage. His usual.

When the waiter was out of earshot he said, "You know the detention without trial provisions?"

"Yes...I've read some stuff in the papers."

"Well, the government has been using them to round up our leaders. Two more just yesterday. Taken from their homes in the middle of the night and sent to Koffiefontein. It's terrible."

"I'm sure they deserved it."

He leaned back in his chair, took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes he said, "Don't start this nonsense again, please."

Anna glared. "I'm allowed to have an opinion. Different from yours, that is."

He took his glasses off. "Come on, Anna, let's not fight again."

She watched a man totter past outside. He had a black coat and bowler hat, and an umbrella tucked under his arm. It could have been London. "That would be nice."

He sighed. "It's not like I don't try, you know. But whatever I say seems to be taken the wrong way. It's like walking on a Spur Wing's egg shells. What am I supposed to do?"

"Well..." She looked away. Outside, a mist had infiltrated the square and it was only possible to make out passers-by when they were within inches of the window. "It would help if you accept that I'm my own person. Just because I grew up under the same roof, doesn't make me a carbon copy."

He twirled his pen and joined her in staring out the window. After a minute or more of silence, he said. "Anyway, I was going to say. Smuts will defend his proposed amendments tomorrow afternoon. All I can tell you at this stage is that history is going to be made. You must come along."

"Urrr." She fished her mind for an excuse. "I'm not sure. Elizabeth—"

He threw his head back. "See. There you go again. Listen, she'll be there all right. Her father has her sorted."

Anna was relieved to see the waiter approach. He was of the generation that still regards the job as a profession. He bowed their plates to their placemats and melted away. She watched her father pour a pond of tomato sauce on his side-plate. He then tipped the salt cellar over his egg. Nothing there. He cursed under his breath and tapped it on the table. "Jong," he said, "I don't know why I still come to this place. Nothing works." Then he knocked the cellar's base with the flat of his hand and there was a sprinkling of salt.

"So why is the amendment such a big deal?" she said, holding out her hand for the pepper grinder. "I mean, I know these special powers for the police has a bitter taste for you, but it's been going on for a while now."

"Ja, you're right." He sawed off a piece of sausage and shovelled it into his mouth.

"So what is it then? Why are you being so cagey?"

He chewed several times, swallowed and wiped his lips with his serviette. Satisfied that no-one was listening he said, "This is confidential, hoor hier."

"You've said that already."

He leaned forward. "This time we're going to abstain."

"But why would you do that? That would hand it to them on a platter. I'm sorry, Papa, that's just not your style."

"Wait." A smile teased the corner of his mouth. "I'm not finished. Right after that we're going to table a motion of no-confidence in Smuts."

Anna swallowed a bite of egg. It was greasy and the yoke broke before it had entered her mouthease. It was at times like this that she missed Hannah's cooking. "How does that work?"

"It says we don't believe he's fit to govern."

She blew steam off her coffee and brought it to her lips. "I mean, doesn't the government still have the votes. What would be the point?"

He was unable to stem his smile. "For one thing, not everyone in the United Party caucus supports the bearded devil." He took a chunk of bread in his fingers and used it to clean the yolk from his plate. "The rest is a long story."

She leaned back. The coffee and a filling stomach was comforting. "I've got time."

He glanced at this watch. "I wish I could say the same." Then he slurped at his coffee. "Anyway, watch my words: it's going to be historic. Remember, the Assembly will be packed for the debate. And the media..."

Anna felt her appetite drain. *All of this should not be necessary if they vote correctly tomorrow.* The conversation she'd heard in the tunnels was replaying in her head. She placed her fork and knife in a tepee on her plate, tried not to shake. "And what if you lose the vote?"

He daubed yolk from the sides of his mouth and replaced the serviette in his shirt. "It's all right. It will anyway be a propaganda coup."

"Then why don't you look happier?"

He closed his eyes. When he opened them his expression made his face look older by a decade. "Our own people...Just when we need to be united. Would you believe it?"

She placed a hand on his. "What is it? Are they still planning to walk out? Even with this motion?"

He nodded. "It's worse. Now they're threatening to boycott the whole session."

Anna felt a surge of hope. An idea was forming. "All right. So maybe you need to rethink things. Why don't you...say, join them? You've already got a reputation as a hardliner. People would expect it."

"Yes, but how could I just change my path like that? What about Daniel. Jislaaik, it's hard."

"So what are you going to do?"

"Well..." He took a bite of toast, chewed. "I'm in two minds."

"Ha." She leaned back. "That will be a windless summer at Rietvlei. My father is undecided."

He eyed her. "Why are you so interested?"

"Oh, nothing."

He ruminated on his egg. "So, what do you think I should do?"

She was thinking of dynamite, of Fanus, and the German who called himself Kurt. Knowing that she had to go easy on her father, lead him to make the decision for himself. "I don't know. I suppose you must do what your political conscience tells you. For better or worse. Isn't that what you always told me?"

He scanned the restaurant again. Only one other table was occupied - a booth, three from theirs. Two businessmen, balding and serious. They were finished their breakfast and had presented papers. "Ja-nee. It's not that simple."

Anna felt desperate. It was time to lay down her cards. "Don't go," she said. "Promise me you won't. Tomorrow's session, I mean."

He stared at her, both eyebrows a question. "Why on earth not? It's my job."

Anna looked out the window. The mist on Church Square had thickened and the statue of Onze Jan was only just visible. With his hands clasped behind his back, the patriarch looked like Vladimir Lenin staring into the beyond. "I can't explain," she said at last. "Not now at least. Just do this one thing, Papa." Her eyelashes closed and opened. "Promise you'll stay away. For my sake. Please."

Though still taller than her, even seated, her father seemed to have shrunk. "I don't understand." His expression was sad and lonely. "But for your sake..." He sighed. "I'll think about it."

She felt close to tears with relief.

"No man." He downed the remainder of his coffee, plonked the cup on the table, said, "How can I let Daniel down like that? Shame."

An alarm went off in her but it was masked with irritation. "He doesn't look to me like someone a person should ordinarily feel sorry for."

"Right so. But sometimes I wonder how he handles all the in-fighting. Not to mention his battle with the establishment. I wouldn't want his job in a hundred years."

"Oh yes? You expect me to believe that? Come on: I know how ambitious you are."

"You may not believe this...But I know my limitations."

"That's funny."

"Listen," He placed his hand on hers. "There's no way. Think about it. I'd have to move to Pretoria for half the year." He looked her in the eye. "No way in hell I'm leaving you like that. Or the farm."

She wanted to withdraw her hand but it wouldn't respond. "Oh come on: since when have family considerations stopped you from getting what you want? Anyway, I'm in Cape Town now. I've got friends. A place to stay."

"I know. I know. It's not just that, it's..." He glanced out the window. From the booth there was a view up Parliament Street past the House of Assembly toward the mountain. Then he snapped back, looking through her now, lost in a parallel world.

"You mean Margriet, don't you." she said. "You've fallen for her."

He laughed. A reddening about his neck. "She's all right. Good for a...laugh. But she's not a shadow of...You know."

Anna recognised a tune crackling to life on the gramophone. It was a recording of Vera Lynn. *I may be right*, her voice warbled against the saxophonist, *I may be wrong; but I'm perfectly willing to swear...* Anna didn't trust herself to speak without crying so she listened...*that when you turned and smiled at me; a nightingale sang in Berkeley Square.*

"Sorry, Engel. I didn't mean...We'll always have each other." He straightened his knife and fork on his plate, and glanced about for the waiter. "As far as I'm concerned, anyway."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Ag. Nothing. Just...I see the way men look at you these days. And you at them."

She laughed. "Come on. That's normal."

His face grew serious, leaned forward. "Tell me you haven't been seeing him again?"

Anna felt her cheeks warm. A cocktail of caution and sorrow. She didn't trust herself to respond.

"Ah, I knew it."

Anna withdrew her hand, looked down to fold her serviette.

"You're in love with him, aren't you?"

She placed the serviette on her lap and met his eyes. "Even if I was, that would be my business."

"I warned you," he pressed. "He's trouble."

Anna stood. "I don't have to sit here and be cross-examined like this."

"Wait." He pointed at the chair. "Don't you run off like that again: it's rude."

She grabbed at her handbag. "You can call it what you like. But I'm not going to stand for it any longer. I'm a grown woman now. When are you ever going to accept that?"

He ripped his serviette from his shirt and threw it on the table. "Luister hier." At the far wall, the waiter straightened. "Don't try me, my girl. You see that man again and there'll be consequences."

"Consequences? There you go again. You might have scared me with that when we were on the farm but now...I simply don't care."

"Right." He stood, his head just shy of the ceiling fan. "That's enough..." He glared at the waiter, who had bent to adjust a place setting. "You so much as talk to that German again without telling me and your days at Michaelis are finished."

Anna reeled inside. Words came before thinking. "But that's preposterous. I've already registered. I'm—"

"That's meaningless. I could make irrelevant any so-called agreement you may have entered at any moment."

"No you can't."

"You're a minor, Anna. You have no rights. Believe me on this. If there's one thing I do know more about than you, it's the law."

A pensioner shuffled into the café and took a seat in the closest empty booth. Vera Lynn's voice was fading at the chorus and the gramophone was more crackle than music. The old man buried his face in his menu. Something inside Anna had snapped. Like an elastic band, stretched three inches past breaking. "Do what you have to," she said. "Just don't expect me to talk to you again..." She wanted him to remember her stare. "Ever."

Later, when she thought back on their parting it was his image that lingered: of a man once all powerful, stooped and shrunken in sadness. And the part of her that, no matter how badly he'd treated her and how justified her anger, wanted so desperately to run, throw her arms about him, and confess. He was her father, after all. He'd make things right. He always did.

Instead, she turned, rallied the composure to thank the waiter, and walked out.

Chapter 26

The fog was cold for summer and droplets tickled Anna's face as she marched across the poo-stained paving in the direction of the mountain. The slinging match with her father was still reverberating through her mind and she was angry to the point of shaking. Halfway across the square, a pair of pigeons flapped from the ground in front of her and settled on Onze Jan's head. She stopped, breath billowing, and looked up. The statesman's brow was wide and furrowed; it was hard to imagine a man as severe being adored by a nation.

At the corner of Parliament and Spin Streets a car appeared from the grey and passed. Anna followed it down Bureau Street past the Old Slave Lodge and the Groote Kerk toward the city. At Adderley Street the mist had thinned and it was possible to see splotches of blue above the buildings. A breeze had sprung from nowhere and the red, white and blue of the Union Jack tugged from a flagpole above the Supreme Court. Relief. The phone booth was there on the opposite street corner, red and proud as she'd remembered it.

It was colder inside than out, and cramped. The phone book was dirty and dangled from a chain that was bolted through its spine. Anna thumbed to the business pages. Paschen Engineering was listed in bold capitals with two telephone numbers. The twopence coin rattled on metal as she fumbled for the slot. Then she braced her back against the glass and dialled.

"Hallo," a male voice, thickly accented, answered at the sixth ring.

Anna tried to speak but couldn't.

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Sir. Good morning. I was hoping you—"

"Wait a minute, Miss..?"

"Anna. Anna van der Vliet." There was a crackle on the end of the line.

"I see. And what can I do for you?"

"A customer of yours. My friend. Thomas. I was wondering if you knew where I could find him."

The man rasped a cough. "You say Thomas..? I am sorry, you must understand, we have hundreds of customers, I—"

"He's German."

"Miss van der Vliet...The name of our firm is Paschen, ja? The majority of my customers are of German origin. That is how it works."

"Yes, but he was at your factory yesterday. Needed engine repairs."

"Ah, this is the problem. I was not in the works yesterday. You are not to worry. I will speak with the foreman. Your number, Miss van der Vliet?"

Anna sensed the conversation was running away with her. "Sir," she said. "Please. He's of medium build; light brown to hair; the kind of blue eyes that are hard to forget."

There was the sound of shifting furniture in the background. A pause.

"Mr. Paschen? Are you still there?"

"Ja, ja. I am sorry but I am not in a position to help. Goodbye, Miss—"

"No. Wait." The time for timidity was over. "Listen to me. Please. Thomas is in danger."

The line went quiet. When Paschen's voice returned it had lowered an octave.

"I will see what can be done. Is there a message you would like to leave?"

Anna drew air. The future would hang on a sentence. "Yes..." She stalled to choose her words. "Tell him...That things are not as they seem."

There was a click, then a dullness on the line that was more than silence. Then Paschen was back. "One moment."

The air in the booth had warmed to stale and the window was misted. Anna could just see the outline of a man standing at the edge of the pavement. He had an overcoat with a newspaper tucked under his arm.

"Anna?"

Within seconds she was hyperventilating, and leaned back against the booth to stop from falling.

"Anna, is that you?"

She opened the door a crack. The air that flooded in was cold and welcome. The man was in focus now, side on. There was something stolid in his posture and familiar. Not taking her eyes off him she pressed the handset to her ear and spoke. "Thomas. I knew you would be there. I just knew. I—"

"Sshh. Slow down. How did you know to contact me here?"

"Oh, my darling, I..." The line beeped and paused and beeped again. Anna scratched in her purse. There was only one coin left and she slotted it. "My darling, there's so much to say but we're about to be cut off. I need to speak in person. Today."

"I understood we were never to see each other again."

"Yes, but...I can't explain now. Everything's changed. You've got to believe me. Please."

"I will come. Where are you?"

Anna looked outside. A double-decker bus rumbled past and then the stranger was there again, his form still partially obscured by the misting. She swallowed. "Corner of Wale. Outside the bank."

"Good. Stay where you are. I will be there in twenty minutes."

Anna rubbed the window. The stranger was facing her now. There was a tingle in her spine. "No. Wait. It won't work for you to meet me here. Oh, Thomas, they're here, they're—"

"One moment. What is the matter? Who is it that's there?"

There was a beep down the receiver. "Oh, darling," Anna said. "There's no time left. Just tell me where I can meet you." There was another beep. She wanted to shout.

"Don't worry. We'll plan something different." The beeping was more insistent. Another click. Then his voice again, softer. "Are you wearing closed shoes today?"

She looked at her feet. Her takkies were still damp and soiled. "You could say so, why?"

"This is good. I will bring forward my plans for this afternoon. Meet me at the Lower Cable Station. Inside, at the ticket office. One hour, I will..." The beeping changed to a drone. Anna replaced the receiver. It felt like the booth was moving or it was the buildings outside. The man was still standing there, spinning with them part-way, then resetting. Like the needle of a stuck record.

She picked up her bag. The only hope of besting him, and it was a slim one, was the element of surprise. Before fear got the better of her again she forced the door open.

"Inspector," she said when almost upon him. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

The newspaper dislodged from de Villiers' armpit and he stooped to regather it with both hands. When he looked up his face was reddened and more lined than she'd remembered, his sideburns litmus ends of silver. "Jissis," he blurted. "If it isn't Miss van der Vliet."

"Oh please. Don't pretend this was an accident, inspector. I may look young and vulnerable but that doesn't make me stupid."

"I didn't think you were..." He ironed her with his eyes. "Stupid, that is."

Anna resisted the temptation to look down, conscious of the splotches on her dress. "Have you been following me?"

He twitched his moustache like a rock rabbit, glanced at the restaurant door. "Who says it's you I'm interested in?"

"I hope that's not a play on words, inspector."

His ears reddened. "I'll choose to ignore that. Tell me: you are close to your father, aren't you?"

Anna tensed, bracing her mind with the acrimony of their parting. "Was close, perhaps."

The arch of his eyebrow twitched his ear. "Oh?"

"Where is this leading?"

De Villiers shuddered, as if waking. "Your father is in a lot of trouble." He stroked the hair above his Adam's apple. "But I think you know that already."

Anna considered him. Just another man who was not to be trusted. "I had breakfast with him ten minutes ago. Seems fit and strong as a horse to me."

He dropped his hand, fished about in his trouser pocket. "Ma'am, do you know what the punishment is for treason?"

She felt panic rise but forced a deadpan face.

"Let me remind you, then. It's death, death by hanging. Not a nice way to go, you know. Trust me, I've seen it myself. Sometimes the rope doesn't work first go."

"It's never happened in South Africa. A civilian, for treason. I've grown up in a political home. I know these things."

“Clever. But we’ve never had a situation like this. And if you’re thinking of the pardon, remember: there’s a war on. Our Prime Minister answers to a higher power.”

“He always has.”

“Miss van der Vliet. This isn’t the time to be funny. I can see I’m going to have to spell this out. Again.” He twisted his mouth and sniffled. “Your father has been instrumental in supplying enemy ships. For three months now. At least as far as our evidence goes. Much longer, probably. Our navy boys always wondered how that raider last year could have buggered around our waters for so long.”

She searched him with her eyes. “If you had the evidence you talk about, why are you so desperate that you have to plead with his daughter for help?”

A bus whooshed past. De Villiers followed it as it hissed to a stop beyond the next robot. A woman in heels with a handbag stepped out, ignored the detective’s ogle, and walked toward the entrance to the bank. “Actually...” The object of his gaze sidled into the revolving door. “We would prefer this problem went away quietly.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s a long story. Let me just say that with the political climate in the country at the moment, we don’t want any of this to come out wrong in the news. Someone with your father’s credentials would be a martyr. A cause to rally the...conservative elements of the volk. Jissis, there are enough Nazis in training out there to cause a lot of shit if we give them reason. Sorry.”

“But?”

“Ja-nee. You’re right. There’s always a catch.” He cleared his throat. “My bosses will need a good story. Something to counter the criticism that their political enemies – the lefties I’m talking about – will throw at them.”

Anna waited.

“There’s nothing like a patriot to stir the emotions of the masses,” he continued. “Especially if it’s a woman. A daughter choosing her country above her blood.”

“Mr. De Villiers.” She straightened. “If you think I’m going to...” She clutched her bag under her arm. “You’re wasting my time.” She glanced across the street at the court building’s clock. “Now, if you’ll excuse me...”

He extended his arm. “Meeting someone?” When he’d stopped her he took a handkerchief and daubed his nose.

“What’s it to you if I am?”

“Well, now that you ask...It would depend on who it is.”

“Mr. De Villiers...”

“Inspector.”

“Whatever. As far as I understand things we still live in a more or less free society. Who I socialise with is my concern.”

He stuffed the handkerchief in the pocket of his safari suit pants and eyed her. "Not if that person happens to be a foreign national of an enemy state. Someone who is wanted for questioning."

Anna's stomach muscles tensed, causing her shoulders to hunch. She thrust her hips forward to compensate. "I'm confused. First you say it's my father you're worried about. Now you're accusing me - of what I don't know?"

"Ja-nee..." His head shook several times. When he looked up she could see the steeliness that doubtless made him good at his job. "Miss van der Vliet..." As he scratched behind his ear, flakes of dandruff sprinkled his shoulder. "We have reason to believe you have been consorting with one Thomas von Eisenheim. Commander von Eisenheim, that is. Kriegsmarine." He paused as if to let his words settle. "But I believe you know that already."

Anna felt her cheeks burning.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. Are you all right? Tell me if I'm on the right path with this. Just remember: lying to a commissioned officer of the South African Police is a criminal offense."

Anna looked up. The roof of the mist had cleared enough to make out the mountain beyond the tree tops opposite. What if she were late? There was only one place she wanted to be now and that was in his arms. She said. "You can float all the juicy hearsay you like past me but I'm not biting."

He stared at her. "He's not telling you everything, you know."

"What do you mean?"

"Von Eisenheim. You think he's a good German, don't you? Not one of Hitler's lot. I'll bet he's even given you the story of the *widerstand*. Makes for good drama, I will admit."

Anna felt like she was falling backwards, in slow motion, like there was nothing or no one to catch her."

"What is it? Have I said something wrong? No? All right. What if I told you your lover boy was the first U-boat captain in this war to shoot the survivors of a sunken ship?"

"Lover? He's nothing of the sort."

"So, you admit it then, you know him."

"Don't put words in my mouth, inspector."

"I can see this is going nowhere." He shook his head. "It is apparent there is a lot you don't know about this von Eisenheim character. Not that his eagerness to please the Fuhrer did his military career much good, mind you. Funny how life works, isn't it? Haven't you wondered why your friend is paddling around our sleepy shores when the Americas are where the real slaughter fest is? No? I'll tell you then. Seems like Dönitz is a bit of a stickler for conventions, like his boss, old Großadmiral Raeder. A good German, you could say. If such a thing exists."

"You're making this up. How would you know so much about the enemy, anyway?"

"Let's just say you'll be surprised how much we know about what goes on with those bastards. It's called intelligence, ma'am. Something I'm asking you to apply to your situation."

"Your insults won't help your cause, de Villiers. Nor do you scare me,"

"And if I told you what we think he's doing sniffing about here in Cape Town?"

“Look. I’m not interested, all right?”

“Hoor hier...I’m only going to say one thing more.” He dusted a flake from his lapel. “It’s going to look really bad for you if this business gets out. Think about it: not many people are going to have sympathy for a tart who sleeps with the enemy.”

Anna rose on her toes. “That’s it,” she said. “I’ve had enough.”

He let her pass this time. “One thing before you go,” he said to her back.

Anna slowed.

“What I proposed earlier – making good with your father – it will not be offered after tonight.”

The machinations of the past days were taking a toll and the temptation to give in and confess was overwhelming. She turned back. He was facing her now, newspaper in hand.

A taxi slid past and headed toward the cathedral. “Goodbye inspector,” she said, raising a hand in an attempt to hail it. “I’ll call you if something comes up.”

Chapter 27

The taxi slowed and disappeared around the bend into Wale Street. Determined to ignore de Villiers, Anna hitched her dress and followed up Adderley. Only at the corner of the bank building did she dare glance back. There was nothing. She turned further, scanning the pavement. It was disconcerting. The detective had disappeared.

She quickened around the bend, the cathedral opposite. As she approached the next robot, she became aware of a car keeping pace behind her and turned. It was a taxi, identical to the one that had just passed, and its hazard lights were flashing. She skipped ahead toward the pedestrian crossing but the car accelerated past her and then slowed. The back door flew open. Only hiking boots and long socks of a passenger were visible.

"Get in," the man said.

Anna stooped to peer inside, not daring to believe. "Thomas?" she ventured. He was in khaki shorts with a floppy hat on and a fleece. "Was that you passing back there?"

He nodded. "Sorry, I wasn't so interested to meet your policeman friend."

"Well, good sense prevails. Anyway, what are you doing here? I thought we were meeting at the cable station."

"Yes. But I was worried about you."

"Sure you were."

"Also. What's the matter?"

"Listen. I'm sick of your lies."

He leaned closer to the door. "We can talk about that when we get there. Quick, get in before that detective friend of yours finds us."

She slammed the door. "Go," she shouted through the window. "Before I call him myself." The car revved. Across the street the bells of St. George's had started up. Straggles of the faithful were making their way inside. About the garden the mist had thickened again and the greenery was barely discernible from the grey.

Events happened so quickly then, that for days afterward she battled to reconstruct their sequence. There were arms reaching for her shoulders, a futile struggle and then the new car smell of a floor mat laced with aftershave.

"Bunking lectures, are we?"

Anna spat at his shoes.

"All right, you can get up now."

The first thing she saw was the driver's head from behind. It was narrow and his hair had been shaved high on his neck; there was a bowler hat and scarf but no line of sight to his face. Then the car veered right into a side street, ran a stop street and indicated left.

"I'm not an arc welder," he said as they turned into Buitengracht. "It won't harm to look at me."

The driver waited for a nanny to push a pram across the road in front of them and struggle its wheels to the pavement.

"Won't harm?" Anna said. "That's precious. You've been nothing but trouble since we met."

They fell to silence, both staring ahead as the double carriageway blended to the single lane of Kloof Nek Road.

"Don't you think you're being a bit hard on me?" he said, shifting closer.

Anna rubbed her neck. "You're a fine one to talk. Was that really necessary back there?" They were gaining altitude in broad curves now and the traffic had thinned. The city behind them lay sprawling and the presence of the mountain loomed.

"Actually, yes. Unless you wanted that policeman as a chaperone."

Her eyes strayed to a water bottle between the heels of his boots. It was drenched and wrapped in khaki. "You said you had to do something up the mountain," she said. "That you were bringing it forward." The top of the nek was approaching the umbrella top of a pine on the Camps Bay side rose above the road. They were in the roundabout for a heartbeat before peeling left up Tafelberg Road. "What was that all about?"

Thomas mouthed something and pointed at the driver's back. Then he said, "Fantastic view, no?"

Anna was about to say something, then stopped herself, and sat back. The silence was soon filled by the groan of the engine as they entered the first switchback. As they progressed up the slope the pressure built on the inside of her ears and she had to yawn for relief. She wound down the window and the scent of fynbos flooded the car. On the uphill side the road was banked steeply of clay and the exposed roots of pine tree dangled here and there. At last the road straightened to a contour and the full face of the mountain presented itself. Then Anna noticed the cable car, sliding down the rock face. As it approached the stone and concrete cube of the lower station it slowed to a crawl. She checked the dashboard clock. Ten to eleven. There was still a chance.

The taxi pulled up at the pedestrian crossing outside the station, engine running. Without waiting for a prompt, the driver opened the boot and Thomas climbed out and disappeared from view. Next thing he reappeared, rucksack slung across his shoulder. He slipped the driver a note and, without waiting for Anna, headed for the ticket counter.

The cashier was a woman with a girth that swallowed her chair and she ignored them for a Mills & Boon on her lap. When Thomas coughed she looked up with indolence and pointed at the pricing on the board above her. He slid the money toward her and waited, rapping his fingertips on the counter.

Her eyes shifted from the money to his fingers and paused. "On honeymoon?" she said without taking her focus from his signet ring.

Thomas nodded. The tapping had stopped. He coughed. "We—"

"Yes," Anna interjected. "Tommy's treating me to a picnic." She prodded the rucksack, giggled. "I can't wait to see what he's got in there."

"I see." The woman crossed her chest and gripped the folds of her upper arms as if she were cold. "Well then..." Then she pushed two tickets across the counter. "You're not only lucky in love."

"How so?" Anna said, taking the tickets.

The cashier's breath was laboured as her arm rose to point behind her; there was a sprawling wet patch in the armpit of her blouse. "You'll see. There's not a breath of wind up there. Let's hope for your sake it holds." There was a whirr and clunk from beyond a glass door. "There you are." She winked at Thomas. "Looks like you've got her to yourself."

The woman was only half right. Seconds after the door of the cable car shuddered open, a youngster with shaggy hair and an overbite stepped out. When he saw Anna he beamed, turned a self-conscious red and held out his palms. She handed him the tickets and took hold of Thomas' hand. After studying their receipts for several second longer than necessary the boy waved them on board. Then he pointed to the clock and stood, arms folded and waited. Only when the minute hand ticked the top of the hour did he step back inside and slide the door shut. He rattled off a welcome and safety routine and seconds after that the winch motor was whining again until the cable clunked stiff.

The car inched forward and the slab of the station dropped away to reveal the veld below. The conductor had been gushing nonsense since the end of his spiel and it became clear he must be simple, in protected employ. Then the car had gathered pace and rocked back and forth and they were airborne. Anna pressed her face against the glass of the window and stared ahead. The skirt of the mountain was a hessian of fynbos strewn with boulders that looked as though they'd been hacked from the cliff and hurled down by an ogre. The front face of the mountain was sheer and harsh and broken only by the womb of Platteklip Gorge at half way.

Thomas leaned into her ear. "Did I say something wrong?"

"Impossible: you've been quite as a Field Mouse since we got on board. Why?"

"You seem anxious. Are you all right?"

"Why wouldn't I be? I'm with you."

"You are about to damage my hand."

She looked down: her knuckles were white from clasping and she realised then how moist her palm had become. "Don't worry," she said. "It's not you. It's just...I've got a thing about heights."

He matched her squeeze, turned with a smile. "High places, small places. It turns out you are more sensitive than the farm girl I thought you were."

"Ja. When you grow up surrounded by men you have to make a plan. I even fooled myself for a long time."

"Look this way." He steered her with his hand at her back. "It's better not to look directly down."

The car had reached top speed now and the cable station was shrinking as the smile of Table Bay and the heights of Tygerberg rose to centre stage. The city had for the most part revealed itself and the eleven o'clock sun had consigned the fog to globs about the docklands.

"Spot my place?" Anna pointed midway along the belt of green that started down-slope from the reservoir and ended in the rectangle of the Company's Garden. "See, that's Orange Street."

"I try not to think about it."

"Oh, why's that?" She felt his hand tighten at her back, didn't dare move.

"Never mind. Best not to chase a hopeless fantasy."

Anna turned. The simpleton was staring at her, his mouth like a fish. She glared at him until he looked at his feet. Then she squeezed Thomas' hand, released it, and looked away. Out the window the cliffs of the table were hurtling toward them and Anna swallowed to pop the pressure from her ears. Though she'd done the cableway half a dozen times, the view of the Peninsula still stole her speech for wonder. To her right was the knob of the Lion's Head with its rump petering out to Signal Hill and the fringe of Sea Point's apartments. Beyond that the shimmer of the ocean grew larger until the yarmulke of Robben Island appeared on the offing. "You might want to make a note of that," she said, pointing to a cargo ship steaming past the island under escort of a frigate. "Keep your handlers happy."

"I see," he said, eyes trained on the ships. "That you wish to spoil a perfect day."

"Well, it's the truth, isn't it? It's what you do."

Thomas ignored her. Instead he turned to the conductor, who was looking at his feet, lips moving but without voice. Then there was only the sighing of the wind outside.

Directly below them was the outline of a path on a traverse between two rock faces. The ridge couldn't have been wider than three body lengths and then it plunged hundreds of feet on either side. There were two climbers, one of whom was waving. Anna, amazed that anyone would be daft enough to be so exposed, returned the greeting. But soon her vision became blurred and the car's floor seemed to spin about her. When she looked up she thought for a moment that they would crash against the slab of the table hurtling toward them, but then the cable stiffened and they were slowing and then gliding into the receptacle of the station.

When the car stopped, the conductor started up again, blabbering about safety and closing times and the need to have a good time on the mountain.

Thomas smiled at Anna, shrugged and hooked a thumb under his shoulder strap. The instant the door clanked open he was pushing past the conductor and into the tunnel.

"Lady, I'll be after you," the conductor said, and doffed his hat.

Anna stared at the place Thomas had rounded the corner.

"Ma'am? This is it. No more stops."

"Yes. Of course...." Anna swallowed. The craziness of being up a mountain with a man she'd only recently met, was dawning on her. "Tell me: when is the next car down?"

The conductor's tongue rested on his teeth. He counted on his fingers. "Twelve o'clock, ma'am. Yes, that's right, twelve o'clock. Every hour, on the hour. Last one at six."

The door jerked on its hinges. For a moment Anna imagined the events of the past week were a movie that could somehow still be rewound. Her eyes followed the cable's droop to the lower station. "And now?" she said. "Are you going straight back down?"

His mouth hung open.

"In ten minutes, ma'am." He straightened.

Anna corralled her feelings. She'd thought the matter through from all ends. Regardless of her fear, there was no backing off now. She touched the conductor's wrist. "Can you do me just this small favour?"

The youngster blushed. "Ma'am?"

"I'm just a little worried we may get lost. My fiancée, you know, he's a proud man. Not good with maps."

As he nodded his overbite lengthened.

"Thank you," she said. "Now listen: if we're not back here for the two pm car, I want you to call my father. Please. I'll give you his details."

He pulled a pencil from his ear, and made to write on the stub of their tickets.

"His name is Stefan van der Vliet," she continued. "He's an MP. That's a Member of Parliament. Van der Vliet is spelled V-I-I-E-T. Did you get that? Good."

Before rounding the corner of the tunnel, Anna already regretted having left the message. What if the conductor got confused, called her father right away? Or if the picnic turned out wonderful and went on a while...

"There you are." Thomas took her hand. "What is it? Are you having second thoughts?"

Anna laughed. "Don't be silly. I'm just soaking up the view. Isn't Lion's Head just lovely from up here?"

"Ah, yes, but it's so much better from the other side." He tugged at her hand. "Come. Aren't you hungry?" They exited the building to a deck with viewing points about its perimeter. The sky was wide and clear and meringue-whisked with cirrus. He stopped at a telescope and lowered his rucksack from his shoulder to the ground. "Perfect, is it not? We are alone."

"What have you got in there?" Anna pointed to the bag. "A load of bricks?"

"You will see," he said, stooping to sight his eye to the horizon. Then he tapped the scope. "Scheiße...This needs a coin. I am sorry."

"Don't worry," she said. "We'll just have to enjoy it the old fashioned way. Hey, look there..." They stared out at the ocean which in the shimmer looked like a cake iced unevenly. A flotilla of ships appeared to be stationary and the sun's reflection on the water made a column of light. "More for you to report on."

"Ha." He grimaced. "This is no longer funny."

"Rather laugh than cry. You don't expect me to just turn a blind eye do you? To your spying on my country."

"Having spied," he said. "I believe that is how you would describe it in the past tense. How could I continue after I've known you?"

She shoved him playfully. "Oh, go on, you don't think I'm that naïve do you? That you'd chose me over your country." She looked him up and down. "A looker like you? Goodness, you must break a girl's heart in every port."

His eyes seemed to retreat and he stared through and then past her.

"What are you looking at?" She turned. Far below the palm-fronds of Camps Bay Beach grinned at them. There was a glint from a car moving parallel to the beachfront, then another.

Thomas stepped next to her and pointed to a white smudge in the nose of the bay. As her eyes focussed, Anna could make out that it was a rock with waves crashing about it. She followed Thomas' finger to a stripe of foam which extended a handbreadth from the rock across the offing.

"It's beautiful," she said.

"Yes. Looks like a giant feather, don't you think?"

"Mmm. No. Too straight."

"I don't mean of a bird."

"What then?"

"It's a naval term." He held the nail of his index finger at his nose and ran it forward through the air. "For the wake of a periscope."

"Feather. That's lovely."

"Yes, but when you see one, you have reason to be worried. It means a submarine is under way below the surface." His hand was at her back now, pressing.

Anna didn't shift, couldn't. "Do you miss it?" she said. "The boat, I mean. And your crew?"

He stared out to sea, then left along the peaks of the Twelve Apostles to the south-east. "I would be lying if I said I long for them." His dimple smiled. "They're a rough lot, I'll tell you that much. But...After six weeks together in a cigar of tin, wondering if the next ping on your radar means the end...They become part of you."

Anna held a salute to the sun, narrowing her eyes in the glare. "You said you had a plan."

"I did? When was that?"

"Before, on the phone. You said you were planning to do something up here."

Thomas picked up the rucksack and heaved the strap over his shoulder. "That is correct. You will see. But first...we make a picnic." Then he started across the platform in the direction of the city, veering right onto a path of stone-speckled concrete. A handful of feet to the left of the path the ground fell away to nothingness and beyond it the fan of city and Table Bay. Apart from a band of cirrus there was only the haze of morning between them and the concertina of Hottentots Holland Mountains beyond False Bay.

The path was worn smooth and in places there were still ponds of rainwater or dew that had somehow defied the day and the heat. Though the ground was flat Anna had to take care not to trip as she skipped to keep up. Soon they were passing through a garden of moulded cheese granites. Many of the rocks were clung to by bonsai trees, their trunks gnarled and twisting from crevices in their fight to survive.

After a while the path petered out and Anna had to pause to make out Thomas in the distance hopping from stone to stone. She had arrived at a ledge which dropped several feet to another, and soon the pimple of the cable station had disappeared behind them.

“Good place for a picnic, no?” Thomas was standing on a ledge further down, his back to her and shielding his eyes with one hand. In the other was a segment of map. When he saw her glanced at it again and tucked it into his pocket. Then he set the rucksack on a rock.

“Liewe vader, it’s beautiful.” She was on her haunches and inched forward to join him on the ledge. A spitting distance from them the rock plunged to a wooded kloof. Perhaps two hundred feet off the opposite wall of rock rose to similar height, its face banded in green and greys. To the right was the apex of the canyon; to the left the undulating folds of the cliff opened up to the saddle of Devil’s Peak and the flats stretching to False Bay. They were alone and the air reverberated with the stillness of noon. “I had no idea Platteklip would be so dramatic from this angle. How did you know about this? I’m supposed to be the local.”

He patted his trouser pocket. “It is my custom to know the field of battle, better even than my enemies.”

“So I’m the enemy now, am I?”

The sun reflected off his dimples as he delved into his rucksack. “I don’t know...” He held up a bottle wrapped in a dishcloth. “But it doesn’t stop us drinking together, does it?” He peeled the cloth off the bottle. Drops of condensate garlanded its neck.

“Klein Constantia.” She inspected the label. “You’re not one for half measures, are you?”

“Napoleon’s nectar,” he said. “1939 is a good vintage, no?”

Anna shivered. 1939: it was the year her childhood was taken and the world went mad. She looked across the gorge. Above the opposite cliff the sky was nuanced with pastels of blue and high cloud. It was so still she could make out a hum from the city below. But the peace she’d just felt had been stolen. It was like being woken from a dream by a fire drill. “Put that away,” she said. “Now. Please.”

He drew the bottle to his chest. “And now? Was ist?”

“I don’t know, Thomas. But this is wrong...Don’t look at me like that. All sweet and smiling at me as if I’m putty in your hand. No. If you think you’re going to make up for your duplicity by plying me with favours, you’ve got the wrong girl.”

“He wrapped his hand over the bottle’s label. “And now: what did I do?”

Anna secured her footing in a crevice. It was as though the enormity of the nothingness below was tilting her toward it. She wiggled her backside as far back on the rock as her legs would allow. “I need answers, Thomas. No more confusion.”

“Still now.” He felt in the compartment of the rucksack and produced a pair of glasses from a dishcloth. “I’ll explain everything.” Then there was a knife in his hand and he was cutting the bottle’s seal. He shuffled toward her on the ledge. “Let’s just enjoy this moment. Come, listen to the silence.”

His muscles were thin and sinewy but stood proud of his arm. It occurred to her how easy it would be for him to topple her. The sun had merged with a cloud and she felt a momentary chill. What business had she fraternising with an officer of the enemy? She entertained the thought of running. Though out of earshot now, she could make visual contact with the cable station within minutes.

“Are you thinking of going somewhere?” Thomas tossed the collar of lead to the abyss. Still not looking at her, he flipped the knife closed and flicked up a corkscrew.

Anna dared not respond.

"If I needed to kill you," he said. "There have been better opportunities already. All right, I admit, I have a liking of the dramatic, a sense of occasion..." His arm swept the view. "But this?"

"That's not funny."

"Yes, and thinking me a murderer is less so."

"Touché...Tell me, why then are we here, Thomas?"

His eyes followed a speck of black gliding across the opposite cliff. "You don't like it?"

"Oh stop it. A man as meticulous as you doesn't schlep a bag of rocks and a plaasmeisie up a mountain in the heat of the day for no reason."

He twisted down on the cork screw, the bottle between his legs. "I'll explain now, I promise. First, we drink." Then he noticed something pop up from under the opposite ledge. It was furry and round, like a rabbit crossed with a squirrel and the colour of the stone.

"Foitog. Isn't it cute?"

Thomas shifted away. "What is it?"

"Ag, it's only a dassie, silly. And just watch: where there's one there's a dozen."

Thomas kicked at it. The animal held its ground, eyes angry glass and whiskers twitching in synch with a ruffle of its coat.

"Technically, it's a rodent."

"Is that so?" Without taking his eyes off it, he pulled at the cork.

"Indeed. In fact it's the closest living relative to the elephant. Can you believe that?"

The cork thloeped from the bottle. Thomas inspected it and then poured a finger of wine in his glass. "If you say so, it must be true." He held the glass to the sun.

"Now, now, there's no need to be sarcastic."

He sipped at the wine and, satisfied, filled both glasses. The dassie crept toward them. Thomas kicked again. "Whatever it is, I'll kill it if it comes any closer."

"Foeitog, man. How can you say that?"

He stared at her. "Sometimes I think you love the natural world more than the human."

"At least animals don't lie."

He offered her a glass. "They don't love either."

Anna was about to accept it, then paused, hand mid-air. There was a glint from the crystal. An instinct told her there would be no turning back from here.

"Come on. It's not poison."

Anna's hand was shaking. She didn't trust herself to take it without fumbling. "You're a difficult man to refuse."

He laughed. "I'm sure my men would agree. Except for different reasons."

She took the glass. Wine spooled out and onto the rock.

"Zum Wohl." He held her eyes as their glasses clinked. "To us."

Anna held the glass at her lips to steady it. She wanted to ask him what he meant. Instead she sipped. The wine was oak and caramel and cold on her throat.

A cry rang from the gorge. The speck gliding opposite had grown wings and was black against the rock. Another shuffled along the edge, then flapped once and took to the air. Once clear of the face it caught a thermal and soared. The other bird was close behind.

"Those are Verreaux Eagles," Anna said. "Watch." Their wings were level now, like inverted parentheses in silhouette. The closest one tilted left, a sudden bank right, and plummeted. After a second of free fall it pirouetted twice and straightened to another glide. The second bird followed at a second's lag, twisting in the opposite direction.

"The Lüftwaffe could learn from this. Wunderbar."

Anna watched the eagles chase each other in loops toward the apex of the gorge. "It's like tango in the sky, isn't it?"

"Exactly. Or ballet."

She went quiet. In the distance a lone kestrel winked and dived, winked and dived and then flew off.

Thomas shifted closer. "What is the matter? Did I say something to upset you?"

Anna shivered when his arm touched hers but she kept still. From somewhere far below a voice called out, echoed and died. She knew that her eyes were moist and she couldn't bring herself to look at him. "When Papa met my mother she was a dancer with the Royal Ballet School. That was when he was at Cambridge. I'm told he was an accomplished dancer himself. Ballroom..." Another pair of eagles had taken to the sky. Their movements seemed choreographed with the first two. It was like a living fireworks display by day. She found herself smiling in spite of the tears. "They were the toast of London for a time." She sipped at the wine. A lone bird whooshed overhead and dropped beneath the ledge. "You know the saddest thing about it..? I never saw the two of them dance."

"I'm sorry." His hand was on her leg now; it felt like it belonged there.

"You know, all I remember is the fighting." The second pair of eagles corkscrewed closer. "Or, rather, his berating. It never stopped. In a warped sort of way I think it was a relief for Mama when she fell ill. Only then did he start to appreciate what he was about to lose. Of course I was too young to know any of this for sure, but I remember she was so much calmer than before. Isn't it terrible?"

"This is the human condition." His fingers touched her thigh. Ahead, another eagle was approaching, wings at full span. Its talons were poised at its chest, like the landing gear of a spitfire. "Not to see the beauty that is before us until it is gone." The sun and the heat seemed to have silenced the day and it was possible to hear the bird's wing feathers, flap-braking against the thermal as a kite would. "There is more, not so? That troubles you."

Anna was thinking of the basement, the darkness crushing her breath. The weight of canvas, voices, the smell of bananas. It was hard to believe such oppression was as much a reality as the present.

"No," she muttered. "I can't go on like this." She tipped her glass, watched the liquid run down the rock and trickle into the void. When it had disappeared she shuddered, as if breaking a trance. "People are going to die tomorrow." She was facing him now. "Important people, maybe even one I love more than anyone. How can we just sit here and while away the time. Shame on us."

"Die?" He put his glass down. "Tomorrow? What are you saying?"

"Don't take me for a fool. I know about the well, the plot, I..."

"Plot? You are speaking in riddles."

She felt his elbow brush hers, the skin on skin sending a chill to her shoulder. "Stay away from me."

"Now what is wrong? You agree to go up a mountain with a man, alone, you accept a glass of his wine, and then...you push him away? Also, that makes no sense."

"Listen to yourself. Are you saying if a girl accepts an invitation to a picnic with a man and she's whore?"

"Your father was right," he said. "You can be difficult."

"He's one to talk."

"All right." Thomas slid from the edge and stood. "This isn't important whether you want to touch or not. What is this you are saying about people dying?"

She studied his eyes, his posture. The shadow of an eagle swooped toward her, banked and disappeared behind her. "You don't know, do you?"

He shook his head. His face was bronzed from the sun and there were beads of sweat on his brow.

"How well do you know your colleague?" she said. "Your fellow agricultural salesman from South West."

He stared at her. "Streicher, Kurt Streicher? I am not certain I... As I told you before, he is with another branch of the forces. Sicherheitsdienst or Abwehr, it isn't clear. They are our intelligence services."

She trained her eyes on him. "Yes, but you know why he's here, I presume?"

The shake of his head was almost imperceptible.

"Oh, come on, with him being on board your boat and all? Surely." She glanced toward the ridge and up at the sun. "Time is short. Don't play with me. There's a lot at stake."

"Anna. You must stop thinking me a liar. All my superiors told me was he was on a matter of national importance. That I must accommodate Obersturmführer Streicher and afford him every courtesy of a fellow officer. Besides this, you don't question the SD."

She shook her head. "Tell me, when last did you see him?"

Thomas looked out toward the flats. "I uhm, I suppose at your farm."

"And that doesn't bother you? That an intelligence officer is going about without you knowing the first thing about his movements?"

"It's not my business—"

"The hell it isn't..." Anna heaved herself up, careful to stand back from the edge. Though angry, she was starting to believe him. She scraped granite particles from her hands and straightened her dress. Then she riveted him with her eyes. "You really don't know what they're up to, do you?"

His expression was puzzled.

"All right. I suppose I've got nothing to lose now...There's a plot to blow up parliament."

"What? Mein Gott. This is impossible. Our orders for this mission to South Africa were clear: reconnaissance only."

"Well. Your Sicherheits...whatever they call themselves obviously see things differently." She swallowed. "With some enlightenment from the likes of my uhm, my ex-boyfriend..."

"He stared at her.

She nodded. "Yes, Fanus. He's with the OB. That's Ossewa Brandwag. You've heard of them, I take it. Afrikaner fascists. Take their cue from your lot."

He didn't respond.

"As far as I can tell, he's on the Grand Council. At least he must be, the way he was talking."

"How do you know all this?"

She looked at her shoes. Her feet still had pins and needles from sitting. "I was in the tunnels, this morning, I saw it my—"

"Tunnels? What are you talking about?"

"There're dozens of them. Beneath the city. Its water from the mountain. Oh, there isn't time to explain. They've got dynamite, loads of it. Magtig, I felt it with my own hands."

Thomas gazed, thumb on chin, over the gorge.

"I can't be sure," she said. "But I think they're planning to destroy the House of Assembly. Tomorrow." She was unsteady now, the weight of the void toppling. "If it's true, then Papa's in danger, I..." She felt his hands on her shoulders, steady. The smell of aftershave and the earth.

"Look at me." He held her at arm's length.

Her chin sank to the vee of her neck, shaking. "Oh, goodness, I don't even know why I'm..." She felt her eyes moisten. "It's not fair, on you, you're a soldier, you have a duty, oh, Thomas..."

He lowered his head forward until his eyes were just inches from hers. "You must not worry. Understand?"

Their eyes were locked; it was as if neither was willing to blink first.

"Not worry?" she said. "You say it so easily. There's everything to worry about. Haven't you been listening to anything I've just told you?"

He squeezed her shoulders. "I suppose it is time I explained why we are here."

Anna watched him reach for his rucksack and unzip the lower and middle compartments. He pulled out a rectangular contraption with holes and dials, then another, similar in shape but smaller, and a battery - and laid them side by side on the ledge. "A radio?" she said.

His left eyebrow lifted. "You surprise me."

"The Special Signals Corp came to us, end of last year. Pickford-Dunn, arranged it. A demonstration."

"And?" He connected the first two blocks to each other by way of a tube, and the next two with a cable. "Why was this?"

"The Castle is on a drive to recruit graduates. Specifically girls, now that the cream of men are away. Can you believe that? We're good enough in war but not in peace."

"What has made you so cynical about males?" He grinned. "We aren't so bad when you get to know us better."

"Really? I've been surrounded by men all my life."

He pulled a two-pronged device - it was labelled Kristall 6.18' - and connected it to the second unit. Then he set the nearest dial to 5-8MHz. "So," he said, flicking the switch. "What happened?"

"It was tempting," she said. "The thought of my own salary, independence."

He turned another dial, first one notch, then another.

"Say," she said. "There's something bothering me. The other night - Thursday - on the way to the farm, I saw a light flashing from the sea, just off the coast by Rietvlei. I assume it was you lot, right?"

The lines of his face were deeper than usual but unmoved.

"Don't ask me exactly what was being said," she continued. "But I got a word here and there."

He didn't flinch.

"It was Morse. I did a class on it, you know. It was offered at no cost. Most of us did."

His dimples were back. "I understand. You wonder why we would communicate in a language our enemy is familiar with?" He followed a wire until his index finger rested on a key at the top left corner of the transmitter. "This is a logical question...But you must remember: all our messages are encrypted. Yes, you may recognise what you think is a word. But when you string them together it will make no sense." He tapped once, and again, and a bulb flickered. "And then there are situations where we - how do you say this? - want the enemy to understand."

"So..." He straightened and faced her. "What happened? It sounds like a good opportunity, this signals business."

"Go on," she said. "You're not serious are you?"

"I am German. We are always serious."

"Glad you said that, not me...No, Papa would have killed me."

He shook his head. "Papa this, papa that: why do you care so much what he thinks?"

Her eyes dropped. "It's not just that. I want to finish my degree. You have no idea how badly...I don't know, it's like I have something to prove. Did you know I'm the first woman in our family to go to university?"

He coughed. "Do not be angry with me for saying this...But what about marriage?" His eyes scanned her. "A girl like you could have her pick of husbands."

"Who says I can't have both?"

"Touché."

"Your turn." She looked left to where the Tygerberg was obscured by a ledge. "Anyway. Every man I'd be interested in is up North - who knows for how long with all the seesawing with that Rommel friend of yours. I may as well improve myself in the meantime, wouldn't you agree?"

"Ja, ja..." He twisted yet another dial until the flickering brightened. Then he tapped the key again and the bulb flicked. "Perfect."

"I was right, she said. "You really are a spy."

He laughed. "Wait: you will understand."

Just then a Verreaux appeared behind them, hovering on a thermal. It was close enough to see the hook of its beak and the zebra pattern on the underside of its wings. When it saw them it banked and disappeared.

Thomas reached into the bag again, pulled out a set of earphones and set them on the rock. "Anna van der Vliet," he said. "How long have we known each other now?" He counted on his fingers. "Six days, if you include the night we met. That is less than a week. And yet I trust you with my life." He placed the earphones over his head.

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Shh..." He adjusted the earphones, his finger ready at the key. "Nun gut. We make contact." He started tapping. The light flashed on and off in sync.

Anna saw a movement out of the corner of her eye. She turned toward the ridge and scanned the ridge. At length she noticed the twitch of a dassie. She thought about the cable station, wondered if anyone would hear her if she shouted. "I don't understand," she said. "You bring me up all this way just to watch you radio your handlers? I'm already feeling terrible about not doing something to stop this business. It's cruel."

He wrapped both hands over the earphones and looked toward Devil's Peak and the opposing cliff. "It's not Berlin I'm speaking to."

Confused, Anna followed his eyes. An icing of cloud had accumulated over the Hottentots Hollands range. A hunter moon of False Bay was visible otherwise of the peak. "Your boat?"

He nodded, tapped again, and waited. In the air over the gorge there must have been a dozen eagles now. One glided toward them, talons extended like landing gear. Tail feathers were fluttering like a yachts' sails in a storm. "Still nothing," he said and tapped the same sequence.

Anna ransacked her memory of dots and dashes. The light was flashing fast now but she could make out individual words.

"But that's German?" she said. "I thought you said..."

"There is no time for a cipher."

"But—"

"My men and I, we have our own codes. Your Signals Corp will have to relay this to the British. It will be forty-eight hours at least. By then we will be gone."

Anna stared. Something bothered her. There could be a lot in a turn of phrase. "We?"

He ignored her. "I am arranging a rendezvous."

At the left end of her vision Anna could see Woodstock, and the bend of Table Bay. A tugboat was nudging a man-of-war war into the harbour. "Not Cape Town, surely? That would be suicide."

Thomas laughed. "Not always." He felt in his back pocket. "I have a photograph my colleague took of the city so long ago. Do you recognise this? Seapoint before the blackouts. A beautiful sight, no?"

The photograph was yellowing and its edges were frayed, but there was no doubt Anna was looking at Table Mountain from the Atlantic. "That's impossible," she said. "Anyway, things are different now. There's radar for one thing. I'm told there's a whole section of the castle turned into a receiving station. You'd be like ducks on Zoetendalsvlei."

"Ja, ja, we know that."

"Well, where then?"

He shook his head. "I can't tell you. What if they interrogate you?"

"You could lie to me," she said. "Again."

He shook his head, tapped at the transmitter. "Du verstehst Deutsch?"

"Ein bißchen."

He pulled in his chin. "With an honorary German as a father? I think you are too modest."

"Try me."

He tapped another sequence and then they waited in silence. Then his palm shot up. After an exchange of signals, he paused. "Did you get any of that?" He placed the earphones on the rock.

"Sure," she smiled. "I translated your keystrokes from German to English and then to Morse...Just tell me what your plan is, silly. I'll try my best to believe you."

"You don't let up, do you? This business about me being a spy. What do I have to do to convince you I am telling the truth?" He reached into his rucksack and withdrew a loaf of bread, a hunk of cheese and a knife. He cut two slices of each and gave her one. "Let us eat," he said. "We're going to need it."

"What do you mean?"

He took a bite from his sandwich, chewed. "You remember the detective you were telling me about, plain clothes fellow?"

"De Villiers: how could I forget? The creep."

Thomas worked his food to the side of his mouth. "You said his men had been to Rietvlei; found nothing; am I right?"

She bit into the cheese, nodded. "Mmh, this is ripe. Where did you get it?"

"In Kloof Street, Gardens. A man can get anything there. A bäckerei, metzger; you must see: it is just like a Bavarian village."

“Ja, Papa has taken me there, many times. You were saying about De Villiers and Rietvlei: he said his men were there, that’s it. Papa thinks it means they didn’t find anything.”

“He is correct.” He drained his glass and set it on the rock.

Anna felt her back tense. “You’re not thinking of going back to Skulpiestrand?” she said. “But that’s crazy?”

“Really? Think about it.”

She felt the sun burning her neck and put her hand about it as if for a shield. “Even if you were mad enough to go back there – and I can sort of understand you logic - why would you tell me? Wouldn’t it be top secret?” She searched him with her pupils. “Unless this is one of those communiques you wouldn’t mind – as you put it earlier – if the enemy understood.”

“I give you my word.” He stroked her forearm. “That’s where we’ll meet them. On the beach.”

Her head shook slowly. Something was bothering her again. The same word, out of context. When it came, her eyes dilated and stared straight in his. “Hold it there. What did you just say?”

“The beach. It is practical, order?”

“No...Before that. You said, ‘we’, ‘we’ll meet them’.”

He tossed the crust of his sandwich over the ledge, took her hand, then the other, as if to steady. “I want you to come with me.”

The city to her left, was rotating clockwise; the eagles were all about. She felt a tinge of nausea, like the emptiness of the gorge had magnified gravity. “But darling, wouldn’t that be a risk? To go all the way there to say goodbye?”

“No: I mean come, come to sea with me.”

“You can’t be serious?”

“I have never been more serious. Look at me, Anna. Am I laughing? I am German, remember. We don’t make an unnecessary joke.”

“But...that’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“No it isn’t. I will explain. I—”

“Stop it, Thomas. Don’t tease me like this.” There were dozens of eagles circling, now falling, then rising. One landed part way behind a bush. Between branches she could see its hooked beak, eyes dark and bulging, as if looking at her side on. “You must know I have feelings for you. It isn’t fair.” She was being drawn to him without his pulling. Sensing his presence before his touch.

“I do not tease.”

His voice was at her ear now, stubble on her cheek. His fingers were massaging her shoulder blades. “But I’ve not even been to sea before. I mean other than a fishing trip from Struisbaai. Oh, what am I saying, this is madness.”

Thomas was distracted by another eagle. It slowed to a landing close by, and started preening. When he turned back to her his eyes seemed deeper set than usual, yet stronger. “Come away with me, Anna.”

She looked at him, afraid that if she blinked the moment would be lost. "You mean in the U-boat?"

His nod was barely noticeable.

"But...that's...that's ridiculous."

"How so?"

"Well...To begin with, I'm English."

"You know German. And you don't have to say much, at first. Trust me. I've thought it through."

She shrugged her hands off her shoulders. "Oh, yes? You've thought about everything, have you?" She glanced down at her chest. "Have you forgotten I'm a woman?"

"Of course not." He tilted his head back to eye her height. "I've got a spare uniform. It will be perfect." Then he tussled her hair, risking a smile. "We will need to give this a trim though. Just in case. If you keep to yourself, we'll be well on underway to Madagascar before the crew realises who you are."

"And then? She felt herself swaying. Either that or it a wind had sprung.

"There will be no problem. The men have served with me for eighteen months. I'm like a father to them."

The bulb on the receiver flashed and stopped. She looked back at him. "Even if you're right, we'd get to one of your bases sooner or later. What then?"

"It is all right. I have plotted everything. Four days and we will get to Maputo. Remember Mozambique is a neutral territory. Much of the coastline is uncharted. No-one will find us."

"So we sit on the beach and drink coconut oil the rest of our lives?"

The first eagle had shuffled clear of the bush. Its head was half-cocked, as if enquiring.

He stepped close to her, held her shoulders again. "I am as serious as I have ever been, Anna. You can see I am not a superstitious person. But it is clear we were supposed to be together."

She let her cheek rest on his and where their skin touched it was warmer than the day. A finger ran down her neck and lingered at her arm. "We shouldn't be here," she breathed. "Like this. I can't bear it." She didn't move as his finger continued down her neck and stopped at her cleavage.

"Quiet now," he said. "Don't care for the past: what was right, what was wrong. Or the future."

His hand was on her breast now, first flat, then cupping. "What are you doing?" she said, looking in his eyes now. Their mouths were close, she could feel his breath on her lips. Then his other hand was at her back, drawing her closer, nipples hard and pressing, and they were kissing.

Chapter 28

The first echoes that drifted up from the hollow of the kloof were faint and spaced with silence. Like the far off bark of baboons or stones falling from the cliff. Even as they grew more pronounced, Anna ignored them, preferring to cling to her dream state with Thomas. Only at a squawk from the ridge behind them, did Anna break their kiss.

"What was that?" She studied the skyline.

"Only a bird, I am certain." Thomas hadn't yet followed her gaze.

"Yes, but what disturbed it?"

"A tourist, perhaps?"

"Not likely. That fellow at the cableway told me it's a blue moon when anyone strays further than two hundred yards from the telescopes or the tea room."

"Perhaps, but he did not look like the type of person I would rely on for information. Do you agree?"

Anna nodded. A thought was gnawing at her memory. "Say, what's the time?"

"I don't know. Why?" Thomas kept holding her while turning his head to look at the ridge.

"No, it's a serious question. You have a watch, don't you?"

He firmed his hold. "Was ist? This is good, you and me, here, like this. Do you not agree? It is important to sometimes forget about time. You said so yourself: it reminds us we can be free."

She felt his hand, as if it were bare through the cotton damp of her dress. He was in front of her and behind, an enveloping presence. "Darn. I shouldn't have...Oh, Thomas, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

At last he relaxed his grip, drew back a fraction. "What are you talking about?"

An eagle, perched on the ledge close by, shifted from one leg to the other. Then it test-flapped its wings, and within seconds was airborne.

"That..." She pointed in the direction of the ridge. "I should have known he was unreliable. I—"

"Langsam..."

She couldn't bring herself to make eye contact. "I told him to call Papa if we didn't make it for the two pm cable car." Her focus jumped from rock to bush, as if not sure what she was looking for, then to the sun. "What if the fool got the message muddled up? Like thinking one pm for two...Hey, don't look at me like that. I wasn't so sure about your intentions, you know."

"All right." Thomas was on his haunches, gathering the remains of the picnic into the bag. "It is important to stay calm. Let us suppose he did call after 1pm. That's...half an hour ago. Surely your father would not have been worried right away? It would take him hours, no?"

"Trust me, there's nothing normal about my father. If there was time now I'd tell you things that would make the hair stand straight on a man's back. Like the time my friends and I had a braai at Brandfontein. We were finished matric for goodness' sake, supposed to be adults. But no, there he was tearing through the dunes with his bakkie, dog on the back. It wasn't even midnight."

Thomas laughed. "I can imagine the scene."

"It's anything but funny." Anna stood apart by now, angry with herself. The contentment she'd savoured in Thomas' arms had long-since fled. "I'm my own person now," she said. "I'll be damned if I'm going let him keep on controlling my life. Let him breathe fire. I don't care."

The echoes sounded again: it was hard to tell if they were closer.

"No." He pulled the cords from the radio. "You were right the first time. We must make precautions. It is possible he notified the authorities."

"What are we going to do?" She peered over the ledge. "Sounds like someone's coming up Platteklip."

He drew the map from his pocket and tapped it. "Good: you are wearing closed shoes." He motioned toward the opposite cliff. "We will walk."

"You're joking?" She followed the cliff edge as it rose to reveal the tip of Maclear's Beacon. "You're not thinking Skeleton George, are you? That's miles." She pointed at the radio. "Especially lugging that."

"We are in agreement then." He lifted the transmitter above his head, ready to hurl. "It is time to shed ballast."

Anna almost lost her footing as she reached forward to stop him but the effort was in vain. For several seconds there was nothing, then a clack and its echo zigzagging up the kloof. Before she could say anything Thomas had ditched the receiver and battery unit.

"What did you do that for?" she said as the crash of the landing ricocheted.

"Es macht nichts. This equipment must not fall into enemy...Sorry. British hands."

Within the minute they were clambering over cheese granite and lichen toward the ridge. Before cresting, they veered ninety degrees, and followed the path running parallel to the edge of the gorge. As if they needed reminding there were signs pegged here and there to warn from straying. The ground itself was uneven and the stones smooth and the going was slow. Soon Anna's breathing was at short intervals and deep, and she didn't attempt to speak.

Then they were sliding down a rock face, finding the path again, then at a crossroads. Kasteelspoort, a sign pointed to the right, Platteklip left. Beneath the sign was a stand mounted with a map etched in steel. As they were studying it, the bark sounded again and all was still. Thomas ignored it and instead traced a line with his finger. "Maclear's Beacon," he said. "We keep straight."

Anna followed him up a path of loose stone to the top of the next ridge. There, the landscape flattened to an expanse of bush and reed and then dropped off to an undulation of rock and an ocean iced with cloud. Thomas was in full stride now, one hand clutching the map and the other hitched under the shoulder strap of the rucksack.

For a stretch the path consisted of a sandstone plate winding through the veld, and then sank into a corridor of reed, shoulder height. Beside them a stream gurgled and an orchestra of frogs was creaking. Ferns covered the ground in a carpet and beneath that it was sponge. "Say, Thomas," Anna called ahead. "How do you know they won't be waiting for us at Skeleton?"

"I don't." Moments later they were through the corridor and the view opened up again and there were wrinkles of swell on the ocean "But think: why would your father inform the authorities - especially if he knows I am here? It would compromise his position."

Thomas mulled it over the next ridge. "Ja... You have a point. And I suppose we have to get down somehow. I just wish it didn't have to be so far. My friends did the walk a while back – said it took three hours. You do much hiking?"

"I used to before I joined the navy." He took several strides in silence. "Also, you can't walk far in Heidelberg without meeting a hill...These days the only exercise I get for weeks can be climbing up and down the conning tower. What about you?"

"Oh, on the farm I walk everywhere." They were moving steadily now and Anna had gained her second wind. "Helps me to think. You know...*in ambulare solvere*. But it's mostly flat out there. You've seen the Soetanysberg: it's hardly an alp."

"And in Cape Town?"

She shook her head. "I know...with all this in my backyard...it's inexcusable. I did climb Platteklip though...once, and then took the cable car down." She stroked the front of her thigh. "Jong, I've done enough climbing to know we're going to suffer today – and downhill is the worst."

Anna broke off a stick of thatch and then bent it double. Somehow, she found mindless actions like that a balm. "Tell me about Heidelberg."

"Sure. How much do you know?"

"There's a university, is about it."

Thomas didn't answer. Instead he quickened his pace, powering through and around a clump of proteas and out of sight. But he was waiting for her behind the furthest bush. Both his hands were hitched in the straps.

"What's the matter? Did I say something wrong?"

"I am sorry," he said when she'd stopped. "Something personal. It is not important."

"The hell it isn't. Tell me; I'm interested. The good and the bad."

"I am supposed to be there, at uni." He was staring toward the horizon to another continent. "My grandfather, father, every generation has produced an academic." He kicked a stone from the way and quickened his pace down the path. "Come...We can talk as we go...In 1938 I was enrolled for the winter semester, the classics, it is the family story. In the beginning it was wunderbar. Three friends and I hired a house above the Altebrücke, that's the same side as the Philosophenweg. You must have heard of these places. There was a perfect view of the Schloß."

He strode on without speaking for a while. The only sound in the heat was the crunch of their footsteps on the path. Only when he got to a stick figure of shade from a dead tree did he pause.

She joined him. "And then?"

"Kristallnacht...November '38, it is impossible to forget. Everything changed." His face grew lines. "But it actually started long before then. The SS was infiltrating student organisations for years, leading smear campaigns against academics who - I don't know – were not Aryan enough. It was mostly propaganda – no violence. But that night was different: they burned two synagogues. In

Heidelberg of all places. Wahnsinn." His eyes were trained on his shoes, as though his mind was elsewhere and he was merely speaking through the motions. The path rose toward a ledge, and his breathing was audible between sentences.

"That must have been terrible."

"I would be lying to you if I said it upset me at the time. I just wanted to get on with my studies, maybe have a good time on the way. What...what was happening with the Jews, and the Communists...this was not my business." He slowed, trod over a boulder and pressed on. "But then the Wehrmacht started to recruit. In the beginning I was excused: my father has connections. But later the pressure was too much. I did manage to get into the navy though – we thought that would be safer." He chuckled. "We forgot about the U-boats."

"I'm sorry," Anna said. "You'd have made a marvellous scholar. I can tell it's your passion: thinking things through."

"This is true." He held up his palms. "But I am practical too, oder?"

She shoved him playfully from behind. "A renaissance man, hey."

He laughed. "Like Goethe. Ah, I wish for that. He was in the grounds of the Schloß once...They say his spirit still wanders about when there is mist in autumn. If you come there one day, you will see why they say this. The place is beautiful enough to believe a great intellect would choose to haunt it."

"Goethe this, Goethe that. You're just like my father. I can't tell you how often he would quote him. It used to drive me mad. I don't even agree with the chap's philosophy."

He turned. "How so?"

"Oh, I don't know enough really. Most of what he says flies over my head. I just remember some business about man becoming part of nature. Its hocus-pocus if you ask me."

Thomas laughed. "Gemüt, you mean? That is a long discussion. What is it you object to?"

"To me it's simple," She opened her arms. "God created all this." She spread her arms. "When you look up there - the sun and the moon and the stars - and there, the flowers and the ants: do you really think there's another explanation that makes any sense? No, of course not. We were made, plain and simple, made to rule."

"Yes, well..." He had stopped in front of a cairn, rocks piled above eye-height with a beacon atop. "Maclear's," he said. "According to the map it is all down-hill from here." He clambered to within reach of the beacon. "Did you know they used this to calculate the curvature of the earth for the first time?"

"Is there anything you don't know about?" she said when he joined her at the base. "Come, let's press on. She scanned the horizon, first the table top they'd come from and then to the saddle of Devil's Peak below. "We're too exposed up here."

The path wound ever steeper with loose stone as they descended from the beacon, and they had to concentrate on every footfall to stop from slipping. Although the sun was well past its apogee the day seemed to get hotter with every mile and Anna had to swallow often to suppress her thirst. For a time the mountain seemed to be tiered like a wedding cake, each layer being progressively shallower and wider and revealing more of the Constantia Valley's vineyards and Muizenberg Beach beyond. When they arrived at an exposed rock face, Thomas slithered down ahead of her and

offered his hand. Out of pride she refused, edged across the ledge instead, and slid, feet first. Next thing his hands were at her waist. They had arrived in dale of fynbos heather and fern with the occasion lean-to of granite.

At first she was self-conscious of her sweat-drenched blouse but the feeling soon gave way to excitement and she held her ground in his arms.

"You know what I am coming to love about Africa?" he said.

"Me?"

"That, of course," he laughed. "But I was meaning the open spaces. The fact that a man can walk for hours on an end and not see another person or building is a freedom I cannot describe. In Germany, this is not possible. Every few miles there is another village. Civilisation, or so it is called."

"What about the mountains – I thought you had tons of them?"

"That is true. But even in Bavaria: if you climb an alp on any day of the week you can expect to meet someone. Or find a rescue hut. Sometimes even a hotel."

"That's too bad," she said. "A man needs solitude. Though I wouldn't be upset if I saw a restaurant now." She tugged at his rucksack's zip. "Magtig, I would kill for a drink. Didn't you bring anything besides wine?"

He shrugged. "Forgive me: I had to prioritise." He trod back onto the path "Come, there is surely a river down there."

When they reached the base of the valley, a stream crossed the path. The water was stained brown but clear enough to see the algae-coated stones beneath. Thomas hesitated at the bank.

"Go, on, silly," she said. "It's fine." When she reached him she dropped to her haunches and cupped her hands under the surface. "Why do all Europeans think our waterways are diseased?" She drank. In spite of its colour, the water tasted sweet and it was cold and lovelier with every mouthful. Satisfied, she splashed her face and neck and stood. "And?" She became self-conscious again and more so when she realised her blouse was soaked. It was the first time she could remember a man looking at her in that way and it thrilled her.

"I am sorry if this sounds like a cliché," he said, now looking in her eyes. "But I have never seen a woman as beautiful."

Anna wrapped herself in her arms. "Don't lie: I know my limitations: I'm just a plaasmeise, for heaven's sake." A breeze wafted down from upstream, ruffling the pond and causing a dragonfly to rise, languorous. She shivered: it was happening too fast - her feelings - and there was no telling where they could take her if left unchecked. For a distraction she remembered why they were there, and turned her face to the path. "What are we going to do? When we get down, I mean. The day's almost over, and tomorrow..."

As if he hadn't heard, Thomas stooped to drink. After several handfuls he rose, dripping. "It is simple. I will frustrate their plans." He squeezed water from the hem of his shirt. "That is all."

"You make it sound so easy."

"If it's only dynamite down there, and a fuse - as you report - then it will be a simple matter. I must only be careful that they are not alerted. They must expect to be successful until the very last moment. That way they will be trapped."

She processed his words. "What I don't understand," she said at length, "Is why you would want one of your own men to be caught? This is a war, after all. And you're soldiers."

"Ja, bestimmt: war has become my trade, this killing. But there are reasons for the conflict. A just cause, I believe you would call it."

"Ah: that's what they all say. But really: the Blitzkrieg, a just cause? What nonsense you people are fed: do yourself a turn and read one of Churchill's speeches, or Smuts if you'd find that easier to stomach."

"I have." His face was without a chink. "Both, their speeches and writings. And if you paid attention to the transcripts of Smuts to Lloyd George during the Versailles conference you would have heard him warning the Allies not to be so harsh with the vanquished. Germany's lands taken, the debts...Are you aware of the suffering that caused? We were fortunate, my family, but I am old enough to remember the desperation." He fell silent and the only sounds were the trickle of the stream on the other side of the path and air sighing through reeds.

"I understand," she nodded, thinking. "At least I'm trying to. But isn't Kurt one of yours? In intelligence, perhaps, but a soldier nevertheless."

It was as though a cloud had passed overhead and his face was in shadow. The cruelty of his expression frightened her. "That bastard is no soldier." He kicked at the sand. "The SD, Brownshirts, these are constructs of that...painter's twisted imagination." He fished the wine bottle from his rucksack, drained it on the sand, and then filled it. "There is no excuse for their madness."

"It's confusing," she said. "I thought a German was a German. Anyway..." She took the bottle from him, took a swig and handed it back. "I can't let that happen to Fanus." She plucked the front of her blouse off her breast and felt the air cool her skin. "He can be idealistic, bombastic even. But he's not a bad person." She shivered. "If he was caught he'd be hanged. I couldn't bear it, I—".

"Anna." He lifted his rucksack. "You cannot be responsible for the actions of others. Fanus is an intelligent man. Anyone can see that. He will understand the risk."

"Yes, but there must be a way..." She shuffled a pebble from her shoe and tossed it into the pond. A tadpole surfaced and dunked back in the water. An idea was gathering form in her mind but for now it was good just to stand and feel the breeze cool her face. "I know," she said to herself as she stepped back onto the path.

"What was that?" he said, taking her by the wrist as she passed.

"Ag, nothing."

He didn't let his grip go. "I don't believe you."

"That's rich coming from you. Mr. Truth himself."

"Anna. Please. It is important we communicate. There is no time for a misunderstanding. You must not worry: I will take care of things."

She yanked her wrist free, glared at him. "Don't worry? You expect me to sit around like a hapless hausfrau waiting for you to 'fix' everything? Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not that sort. Not even a close fit."

She stomped down the path. Only when she'd crested the next ridge did she pause. The sight of the dense vegetation at the head of the gorge had a calming effect, and her breathing subsided.

"So what are you thinking of?" he said when he caught up.

There was a breeze rising from the valley and she billowed her dress, as if to dry it. Then she put her hand to her forehead as a shield to the sun, and squinted toward him. "He's still in love with me, you know."

"From what I saw at the farm, I can only agree," Thomas said. They stood together for a long minute at the top of the gorge and surveyed the valley. Far off, the Cape Flats were obscured by a haze made orange by the sun's fading. Along the railway line to Muizenberg there were villages strung at intervals like pearls, with pastures and tilled fields between them. Closer by the suburbs became denser and a darker green until they melted into the gardens of Kirstenbosch at the tongue of the gorge.

"I hope you are not considering to do what I think you are."

"He'll listen to me, Thomas, I know he will. I'll make something up, tell him the police know - it doesn't matter. He's an Afrikaner, remember, I know how it goes. For all our bravado, we're nothing if not pragmatists."

The sun on his face accentuated his lines. "No. This is madness. He is a fanatic. We cannot be sure how he will react."

"I suppose you're right. But I owe it to myself to try. Think about it: if we get him onside, we have a chance of making all of this go away. Papa's predicament, mine too. In fact it ends well for everyone. It might be a long shot but it is worth taking it, don't you think?"

He smelt the air, lips pressed together. Then he shook his head slowly, as if unconvinced of his reason. "No. There is too much risk."

"Really? And if I do nothing: is that not risky? Listen, I'll be discreet, give him a way..."

"Anna." He stepped in front of her to bar her way. "You could get caught. Don't—"

She stepped about him and was on the path before he could stop her.

"Not so fast." He called to her back.

"Sorry," Anna shouted over her shoulder. "If I stop too long my muscles are going to cramp up. You wouldn't want to carry me, would you?" The path plunged switch-backing into the kloof and here and there her shoes skidded on loose stone. Soon they were under a canopy of Yellowwood and Cape Beech trees in a golden smattering of sun. The ground became hard clay, veined here and there by roots worn smooth by a thousand shoes. The vegetation thickened and the air was darker and from everywhere and nowhere there was a twittering of birds. Then they were amongst the boulders adorned in moss and fern, of what must have been a dry river bed.

Thomas caught up with her at the top of the first ladder. "Excuse me," he said, nudging past her. "This is a situation where the gentleman goes first." He turned back to the slope and stepped onto

the first rung. Seconds later he had shimmied down and out of sight. "All right," He called. "Your turn."

Only when her foot rested on the metal did Anna realise how much her legs were shaking.

"You can do it," he said. "Just don't look down, that is all."

"Oh, be quiet. I'm not scared." She lowered herself a rung. "My legs are just hammered, is all." She forced her pace down and when she got to the ledge she refused his hand. "Not all women are helpless, you know. Here..." She shuffled across the rock to the next ladder. "My turn to lead the way."

She swallowed her fear and clambered down the second ladder, and, without waiting, the next two. When Thomas was on the third from last rung she offered him a hand. He laughed, and let himself drop to the ground. She helped him up, and, flicked some soil off his shirt and indicated he lead them downhill.

The path resumed, steep at first and then it flattened. The light was fading as the roof of the forest thickened. Anna trudged several paces behind, the heaviness of her thoughts adding to her exhaustion; the more the stick figure of her plan had grown flesh, the more worried she became.

It was a relief when they finally intersected a jeep track and the world opened up again and they could follow its winding. Though the sun had set in the valley the sky above them was still light and Anna's mood lifted. Then the road gave way to a lawn, which fanned out like a delta to banks of tidy flower beds and silver trees. They stood side by side to take in the view. "Could be England, hey," she said. "Tame as a shrew."

"Or Germany. We are also civilized. So..." He scanned the various paths. "Quo vadis?"

"It's easy," she laughed. "Head downhill. Even a seaman couldn't go wrong."

She was running, fast as her tired legs would allow, the grass, soft and welcoming. The path narrowed and they were between ericas and protea bushes mulched at their stems. Every now and again a plant had a label at its stem or a sign pegged in the ground to identify it. The slope steepened and they were on a stone path between the stems of ancient Cycads. Soon they were back under stinkwoods and yellowwoods, following a stream until it gurgled into a bird-shaped pond where by unspoken consent they paused.

It was a secluded space, almost dark, with branches which sagged to the surface of the water. After taking her shoes and socks off and hitching her skirt, Anna stepped into the pool. The water was clear and even in the gloom her toes looked white and swollen. Then she splashed water on her thighs and ran her hands down her legs which were shaking again and smooth.

"Most people know this as Lady Anne Barnard's Bath," she said.

"Yes, but that is technically incorrect." He removed his shoes and stepped in beside her. "She left the Cape with her husband before it was constructed."

She stared at him. "I'm impressed. How do you know all this?"

"It is my practice to learn about the places we plan to invade." He grinned. "No, I read a book once...They lived at the castle, oder? With a dining room for ninety nine guests. Wahnsinn."

"True. Did you know the army has commandeered it?" She stiffened. "Oh, dear...I shouldn't be telling you this."

He laughed again. "It's late to be thinking of that, would you not say? We are deep in this together."

"I suppose so... It's a radar listening post now. That and a barracks. In fact I would be working there now if I'd joined Signals. Can you believe, some girls sleep there in bunks? Imagine living and working in the space place. I couldn't bear it."

He splashed his face and let the water run down to his already sweat-soaked shirt. "It sounds somewhat like life on a U-boat."

It was quiet by the pool except for the trickle from the inlet. Somewhere far off a child shouted. "I've been thinking," she said. "About what you told me up there. Your plan, as you called it."

"And?" He was watching his toes twitch on the cement floor of the pond.

"It's madness. We'd be outcasts."

"We already are."

"No. You are."

A frog quarked from the far side of the pool. There was a plop and it was quiet. He plucked the end of a branch from above him and tossed it beyond the water's edge. "Also, do you seriously think the authorities aren't aware of your dealings with me?"

"Dealings? Is that what this is?"

"You know what I mean. Why would that De Villiers character investigate you if he had no witnesses?"

"Investigations, witnesses. Magtig: is a woman not allowed to go for a picnic with a man she finds interesting? It may get society's tongues wagging, but it's not a crime."

"It's only a question of time before they decode my communique, Anna. What happens then?"

"You didn't mention me by name, did you?"

"Of course not. But it will not be difficult for them to join the dots. If you will excuse the pun."

The child was calling again; this time from closer.

She felt his eyes stray to her breasts. They were damp again and her nipples were hard against her blouse but this time she felt no shame. There was nothing else in the world she wanted more than to abandon herself to him, agree to his scheme and the consequences be damned. But some ingrained propriety restrained her and she scrambled for resolve. "We're not even engaged. How can we go off together? It's wrong, it's..."

He moved closer, embracing her with his chest only and his knee pressed between the folds of her dress. Above them the tapestry of branches filtered a hundred splinters of the weak evening light. "Normally, I would not want to make you do anything faster than you are not comfortable with," he said, lifting a strand of hair from her cheek to her ear. "But in this time, nothing is as it should be." His voice was low and a tickle on her forehead. "Even my own people—the most civilized and educated of Europe - are looting and killing like in the dark ages. Mein Gott, this world is upside down."

She straightened a crook in his collar. "It sure is," she said, her breathing shallow. His top button was undone and she could see his chest which was smooth and hairless with a sheen of moisture. "But that doesn't mean we should just..." She was forcing words she wasn't sure in that moment she still believed. "Abandon our...values, you know: what we believe." She could feel him against her now, firming as his kisses trailed from her forehead to her neck where they paused.

"Beliefs? How can anyone not believe in love?"

From the thicket behind her came the squeal of children, drawing ever nearer. A reminder, if one was needed, of the fragility of seclusion. She drew back just enough to meet his eyes. "Did you just use the word 'love'?"

His dimples winked. "I believe I did. Is this in order?"

"It's nothing to joke about, Thomas. Don't think I'm some floozy you can bandy that word about with. Think about it: how can we be in love? It's only been a week, for goodness' sake."

"It is how deeply we feel that matters," he said, edging closer. "Not for how long."

Her reason was urging to break the dream, to run, but her body refused. She leaned into him, cheek on cheek. Below, a tadpole darted between her toes. "Why would you love me?" she found herself saying. "I know I'm not unattractive, but..." She shook her hair to hang between them. "A brunette, brown eyes...Hardly the ideal of ein hübsches mädchen."

"No, this must stop." He felt for her hand, wrapped his fingers through hers. "Anna: look at me." He was begging her with his eyes. "I'm about to give everything up. Command of my vessel. My career. Who knows, perhaps my life. This is so much more than surface."

She looked down. Her legs were shaking beneath her dress, as much from the chill as the descent. "I'm sure you say that to all the girls you seduce."

"Here." He drew her closer. His voice was touching her ear and she felt her arms around him and their bodies as one. "I have never felt anything like this. Not even close. Just being with you is enough. Like this." Their lips met, uncertain at first, and then they were kissing again.

"What is the matter?" he said, pausing to look into her eyes. "Why are you so sad?"

She sniffed. "It's just...I don't want us to end." Then they were embracing again, melting into the dappled shade. "Why can't we just stay here, Thomas? Be normal, like other people, marry. Even Papa will come around – when he knows your intentions are honourable."

"Impossible. You must know that. Our countries are at war."

"Our countries maybe, but not our people. Not all of them, anyway." She held him tighter; it felt like there wasn't a part of their bodies that wasn't touching. "You can reinvent yourself, go to ground. Others have done it. Goodness, there's enough sympathy amongst the volk."

"It may be as you say." His hands caressed her back. "But this matter has gone too far."

Anna remembered the tunnels, thought of Parliament, her father and her shoulders tensed. The wander across the mountain had been a respite, like the calm between wind shifts in a storm. She shivered, broke his hold. "I guess you're right," she said, wiping her face. "In more ways than one."

Just then a woman's voice warbled from beyond the bushes - a girl's name, again and again. Then a child broke into the clearing, a girl, no older than six with knee-length socks. When she saw them in the pond she was owl-eyed and gaped.

"Never mind us." Anna was conscious of how wet her dress was and crinkled, "We were just on our way." She motioned toward the pool. "The water's lovely. You should try it."

They hurried along the slate path until it gate-crashed the sunlight. The trees grew higher and bigger again as they approached the restaurant. From the outside the thatch roof and timber structure gave it the feel of a bungalow in a bushveld camp and waiters with black waistcoats and white gloves eyed them as they passed, and then they were at the turnstile. A middle-aged woman squatted behind the glass of the ticket office and ignored them for an approaching customer so they pushed through. Once out, Thomas led her to a stop before the line of taxis this side of the parking lot. "Now," he said, lifting a hand. "We must go separately. I will take the next." The driver acknowledged the call, and his engine spluttered to life. "And Anna..."

She tensed at the knowledge of what he would say next.

"You must not attempt what you spoke of earlier." The taxi rolled closer. "There is no need. I will defuse the explosives. It is my training."

There was something in his manner, more than in his words, that recalled the once dormant litany of her pain. The put downs of a man. The condescension. "And me? What do you expect me to do? Stay at home and expect your call? Well, I have news..." She thought of her father, the threat to Parliament, and Fanus. "There isn't a chance I'm going to wait for you lot to take me seriously because you know what, that's never going to happen."

The taxi door swung open and Thomas widened it. There was a hardness in his face, far more than simply the lines that chilled her. "I think I know you well enough by now, not to try any longer to persuade you." His mouth pursed, as did his eyes. "But let it be on record that I warned you." Then his face softened and he kissed her forehead. "Please," he whispered. "Wait. You must trust me."

Trust me. Another man asking the impossible. It felt like a punch to her stomach. She was about to express her thoughts but switched lines. "All right," she said. "Oh my goodness this is so difficult...Just be careful, and remember...that...that I love you. It feels so right to say that now, doesn't it? Why, I don't know - all I do know is these few days with you have been at once the hardest and most wonderful in my life and I don't ever want them to end." She closed the door and wound down the window, not caring if he saw her tears. "Watch out for yourself," she blew him a kiss, in defiance of her guilt. "Don't leave a message when you call," she called as the taxi pulled away. "Elizabeth can be wholly unreliable."

Chapter 29

The business card was shaking so violently in Anna's hand that she strained to read the detective's telephone number through her tears. In one form or another she hadn't stopped crying since the image of Thomas' frame started retreating through the back window of the taxi as it pulled out of the parking lot of Kirstenbosch Gardens. Crying, not so much for the agony of having to choose, as for the implications of the choice she'd already made. She glanced at the front door, wishing she'd bolted it from within. There'd been no sign of Elizabeth earlier but it was impossible to be too careful. With the tip of her free index finger she felt for the digit on the receiver's dial, swung it clockwise and released. Then she placed the bucket over her ear, held her hand between her mouth and the microphone, and waited for the exchange to answer.

"Number please," said the operator.

Anna read from the seven digits from the card, keeping her voice low to disguise its tremble.

"Just a moment, my dear."

She flipped the card, and again, to pass the waiting. Outside the kitchen window the garden was still in the afterglow of sunset, and the mountain's table was silhouetted against the western sky. She imagined herself on the ledge, eagles circling, the back of his hand brushing her cheek. Elope on a U-boat? His proposition, though ridiculous, still resonated in the recesses of her spirit. But there was more to life than flights of fancy. Duty, for one thing, and the love of blood and country.

The daydream was interrupted by a dialling tone on the line.

"De Villiers wat praat."

Hearing Afrikaans was somehow reassuring. She ran her fingernail across the top of the business card. It slipped over the edge and the card dug between her nail and the skin, causing her to suck air.

The detective coughed, and switched to English. "Hello, who's there?"

Anna's mouth opened but was without words.

"Listen here, can I help you?"

"It's Anna."

"Ah..." The line went quiet. Then a scratching. Silent again. "The elusive van der Vliet girl. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I need to speak with you," she said. "It's urgent."

A pause and a click on the line. "I'm listening."

"In person, Detective De Villiers. Today still."

"I'd like nothing more, ma'am. You can be sure of that." He rasped another cough. "But I'm afraid it won't be possible to meet this evening. I have an engagement now, with my boss and his boss and then...But perhaps we can meet for dinner. Or later, when I'm off duty."

"And when would that be?"

"That is the trouble, you see. A man can never tell how long these bloody meetings go on for. If I was to guess I would say eight-thirty, maybe nine."

Anna berated herself for not role playing the possible intersections of the two halves of her hastily-laid plan. "Please sir, can't we make it earlier?" She waited for inspiration but it never came. "I have a date tonight. It can't be changed. I've already messed him around once. Please, sir. It is extremely important."

There was another scratch, and a sound like a coin flipping on the back of a hand. "Are you in imminent danger, Miss van der Vliet, yourself I mean, tonight?"

"Urrrh. No."

"Then I am sorry, it will have to wait until tomorrow."

The line crackled.

"All right. I tell you what: how about breakfast?" he said. "I know a place on Parliament Square. It's on the corner...Oh, but of course, you were there yourself, this morning still."

"Hold it one minute. Detective...What I need to tell you is far too important to wait for your bacon and eggs."

"With respect, ma'am, I'll be the judge of that." There was a sound through the line like the shifting of a chair. "If only you'll trust me. Come on, tell me what the story is. What do you have to lose?"

Anna despaired. She should have known it would come to this. Laying herself bare on the airwaves. Not having grown up with a telephone on the farm, she was far more comfortable conversing face to face. Now there was no choice. She inhaled to steady herself, said, "I can blow the operation wide open for you, Detective de Villiers. Names, dates, places."

"Did you say operation? Can you elaborate please? I need to know we are singing the same tune."

"Listen: you know perfectly well what I'm talking about. You asked me to call if I had—"

He coughed to interrupt her. It was rasping and liquid. "Forgive me if I sound sceptical," he said. "But yesterday, when I interviewed you at lunch - you and your father - you were still as a mouse; this afternoon you are up the mountain cavorting with an enemy agent; and now, like magic, you call out of the blue and want to tell me everything you know."

"Please, sir..." She felt like putting the receiver down; she was hyperventilating, eyes moist. "You must know how hard this is for me."

"Too hard." His voice was even. "And that's just the problem. You see: how am I supposed to believe you are ready to give up your own father? I'm right, aren't I: that's what you're proposing?"

"Well you see..." She closed her eyes. "I have no intention of throwing him to the wolves. Sorry, but that's what you people are. No, you see, before I say a word of what I know, you're going to promise me he won't be charged."

His laugh was the chug of a steam train. "Try put yourself in my boots, Miss Van der Vliet. Why in the sweet name of my mother would I do something like that? Your father's a traitor and you know it. He deserves to spend the rest of his days behind bars - if he's that lucky - and I intend to make sure he does, so help me God. No ma'am. Me and my men have been spending ten hours a day for the past three months building the case. There's no way I'm going to chuck that down the drain."

For the first time since leaving the gardens, Anna's spirits lifted. The detective had taken the bait: all she had to do now was reel him in. "I understand," she said. "I would feel the same way if I was in your position." She paused to allow her sympathies to settle. "I mean, you've got your man, so make an example of him. Maybe it will deter all those German and Japanese sympathizers out there. More so those lurking in your ranks."

"Good. I knew you were a smart girl."

"Woman, detective. I'm nineteen. If I call you by your rank, you do me the courtesy of addressing me as an adult, all right?"

"Ma'am."

"Better. Now listen. What if I told you my father's...alleged involvement, is just the periscope of the submarine, so to speak? That I can show you what's really going on."

There was more crackle on the line. Then the strike of a match and a pause. "I'm listening."

"All right. I'll tell you everything you need to know - but only in person."

"Fine, but it will have to be tomorrow."

"If you insist. But no later than eight-thirty."

"Very well. My office then. I'll make coffee. Boere-style?"

"Detective..." Anna was distracted by the gate squeaking outside. She hoped against hope it wasn't Elizabeth. "Before we go any further, there's something else you have to promise me."

"I'm a policeman, Ma'am, not a priest. My truth is relative."

"Well you're just going to have to change your uniform."

"Oh yes? What if I like the one I have?"

"Then you had better take a photograph of yourself in it. Because if you don't take the opportunity I'm offering by its horns there won't be much of a career for you in the force."

"Tough words, for a lady."

"Why don't you just say 'tough words'? Why the patronising?"

"I'll try harder; next time."

For once Anna felt good being angry. It steeled her for what she had to say next. "Listen here, I have all the evidence you need."

He laughed. "I think you underestimate your government's intelligence. We've got files as thick as telephone books on every one of you agitators, your father included. What could you tell us we don't already know?"

"A lot, it seems. Why else would you sniff around the gardens on a week day, so desperate you'd interrupt a father and daughter's lunch date for a fishing expedition?" The gate outside squealed shut to a click. Hearing the familiar whistle that ensued was enough to torpedo any hope Anna had that it was someone other than her friend. "I'm about to have company," she said. "So let me put it in simple terms. You stand at the cusp of greatness. Think case of the decade, no century. National, even international fame. It would be astonishing for an uneducated boereseun from Pretoria."

"What is it you want from me?"

"Oh, you should find this one easy." Anna cleared her throat and looked out the window. A butterfly alighted from a branch and flapped to the grass below. Then there was a dangling of keys on the other side of the front door and a scratching at the lock. "I want you to arrest my father."

"Excuse me."

"You heard me." A key scratched to find its hole. "Tonight, straight after this call. He must be taken to safe custody and held for forty-eight hours."

Silence. Elizabeth swore through the crack in the door, more key scratching.

"You there, detective?"

"Ja, ja. I'm just trying to understand you. First you say we mustn't charge your father. Then we must arrest him. I think you've had too much sun."

"I said arrest and hold, remember: not charge. And no-one but you or I are to know about this. You hear me?"

"Hold on for a minute, Miss..."

"Anna. Please. We can talk as adults, we're equals, in a manner of speaking."

"Ja-nee, I can't simply arrest someone without reason. We're a civilised—"

"Nonsense. You know as well as I do you can lock someone up for days, weeks on end, without trial, on a whim."

"But a prominent politician? It would be a scandal."

"I don't care what you have to do, detective. Just do it..." The thlock of the key turning distracted her. There was an impatient shove but the door only shuddered. "Unless you want to forever be known as the law enforcement officer who turned down the opportunity to save his government."

"Government? What are you on about?"

"Never mind," she continued. "I'll explain over coffee. And once you've given me a written assurance of what we just agreed regarding the honourable member. Is this clear as quartz?"

There was a pheew of smoke blown over the mouthpiece. "I don't know what your game plan is, lady, but it worries me."

"That's the first time in an age I've heard a man admit he's worried. It's like fresh air. So are we singing on from the same sheet now?"

"Ha. That is not so funny. You're protecting your father, aren't you? He's got mixed up in something much bigger than himself and now you're trying to—"

"Just do what I ask. Tonight. Or I'll find someone else to tell."

Static consumed the line and then faded. "Detective?"

"Ja, ja. I'll see what I can do."

"Trying isn't good enough. I need your word."

"And if I can't give it?"

The door flew open with a gust of the South Easter. Elizabeth stood at the threshold, a paper shopping bag under each arm, and a puzzled expression.

"Well then." Anna turned to the window keeping Elizabeth at the periphery of her vision. "It's good bye and good luck."

"Eina," he said after a pause too long. "They breed them tough on the platteland. All right...I'll do it."

Anna turned from her friend, spoke toward the wall. "He's at 425 Victoria Road, Seapoint, flat number 213."

"Good. I will have confirmation tomorrow. My office, eight-thirty. The address is on the back of my card."

Elizabeth stepped in and the door slammed shut in the wind. "What's all the talking about?" she said, dropping her bags where she stood; they were so full they stood on their merits. Then she whisked a strand of hair from her face and applied lipstick to her pout. It was red as a carnation and her skin was pale to the point of translucence. "You haven't been talking to that boy again, have you? You ask me, he's not good for you."

Anna backed away from the telephone toward the stove. "You're right. But it's like I keep going back for more."

Elizabeth put a finishing twirl to her lipstick and capped the brush. "It's the story of my life." She looked for a mirror. "Listen: I told you: if he's too much to handle, I'd be only too happy to oblige."

Anna smiled inside. Shallowness. It was a quality that endeared Elizabeth to her. The tonic of a polar opposite. "Trust me," she said. "This one's way too complicated. But just in case...I'll spare you the temptation." She scrounged for matches. "Sorry Beth. I love you. Some tea?"

Elizabeth shifted her attention from her own reflection to the clock above the mantelpiece. The minute hand called seven. One of her shopping bags toppled to reveal an assortment of blouses. "I need a Scotch after that".

"Help yourself," Anna said. "It's too early for me." She dropped a teabag in the pot, held up another. "You sure?"

"Not for me, thanks." Elizabeth picked up her bags. "I'm going to try these on again." She made for the passage. "One can never be too sure." Then she stopped herself. "Oh, before I forget." She turned back to the kitchen table. There was a piece of paper pinned down by the pepper grinder. She waved it at Anna. "That cocky chap dropped by again earlier. The one with the thick Afrikaans accent. Said he'd changed tickets for the late show, hoped you'd reconsider."

"Fanus?" Anna suppressed a hiccup of delight. After a day of heaving herself at an endless series of obstacles, one had finally rolled away of its own accord. She plucked the ticket from her hand and studied it. It was for the eight-forty-five showing of *Suspicion*. She closed her eyes in thanks, praying it wasn't too easy to be true.

"That's it. Left his telephone number in pencil on the back. So, another admirer. You really are the flavour of the month."

"It's not what you think."

“Oh yes?”

Anna put the pot on the stove and “He’s an old boyfriend. In a manner of speaking. Goodness, I hardly kissed him.”

“Still.” Elizabeth ran a fingertip under her bra strap, looked down at her breast. “You’ve got options. While the rest of us can only wait for this bloody war to end. Don’t tell me there aren’t advantages to growing up Boer.”

“That innuendo isn’t fair.” Anna kicked a chair further under the kitchen table. “Almost half our volunteers were Afrikaans. Not to mention the coloureds. You English are too quick to believe your own propaganda.”

“Hang on now,” Elizabeth poured a splash of Bells in a tumbler. “Didn’t you say you were English yourself?” She added a thumb of water. “Half, anyway.”

Anna opened the lid of the pot and watched bubbles form on the bottom. One broke away and rose to the surface. Then another. Like her identities, first one thing then another. Then she remembered her plan, the need for an alibi. “I told him I wasn’t interested,” she said, replacing the lid on the pot. “And that he’s wasting his time and money again...” She held the movie ticket above the waste bin and let it drop. The paper floated down from her open fingers and she watched it settle on the pawpaw skins and tea leaves. “Poor boy. He just isn’t in the same league...”

Elizabeth put an arm about her shoulder. “You really have fallen for the handsome officer, haven’t you? I told you he was a heartbreaker. Poor girl. Now, come, let me help you with that.” She poured the water into the teapot and spooned leaves about. “I thought his ship had sailed?”

Anna shook her head. “Day after tomorrow.” She added a dash of milk to her cup and passed it to Elizabeth. She waited for her friend to pour. “But it doesn’t matter. It’s over.”

“Drink up,” Elizabeth said. “That’s better. I know you don’t think so now, but you’ll get over it. Believe me, I’ve been there. Remember that Welsh fellow last semester. My God, he was perfect. I thought my heart was going to break.”

Anna sipped and allowed the tea to comfort her throat. Then she tinkled the cup to its saucer. “It’s not just that he’s leaving.” She sniffed.

“What then?” Elizabeth’s hand was on her shoulder again.

“I can’t tell you,” Anna managed another tear and let it run down the length of her cheek. “That’s the worst of it.”

“For heaven’s sake,” she said. “What can possibly be so heavy you can’t share it with a friend?”

Anna pulled a tissue from her sleeve and daubed her nose. “It’s too terrible,” she said. “What’s been happening on the farm...what’s about to happen. And I’m...I’m...”

“Slow now,” Elizabeth said. She pulled out a chair. “Why don’t you sit down? We’ll get through this together. Promise.”

They sat, chairs a foot apart. Anna looked at Elizabeth through a blur. She felt a twinge of guilt at her friend’s compassion. It was a side to her she hadn’t noticed before

“Tell me about the farm,” Elizabeth said.

"Goodness," Anna felt a calm return. "Where do I start? You remember I told you about the dinner party? Last Thursday."

"Vaguely. Something about a fight with your father. Go on."

"Well. That's just it. The reason for the fight."

Elizabeth smiled. "This is good," she said. "I can see you're relaxing already. Go on."

"I'd been to the beach that morning. Not Perlemoen Bay by the house. I'm talking about another place. It's not for swimming. No-one goes there."

Her friend was leaning forward, sponging every word.

"I saw footsteps, Elizabeth. Not just one lot, dozens..."

Elizabeth stared at her.

"No." Anna sat upright. "You're right. This is sounding ridiculous. How could I have blamed Papa for chiding me? Goodness, the Prinsloos must have been horrified. It's a wonder Fanus still pursues me."

"Prinsloo? You telling me the fellow who dropped by for you was Fanus Prinsloo? Of Prinsloo Granite? Mercy, even I've heard of them. Listen..." She shifted her chair closer, caught Anna's eyes. "He's no oil painting. That much I'll give you. And that accent...It would grate the most patient... But a Prinsloo? You'd be set for life, my girl. What are you thinking?"

Anna stood. The foot of the chair knocked against the table leg. She said, "Thank you," and stepped to the bin. She rolled up her sleeve. "You've just given me an idea." She delved into the muck and produced the ticket. It was stained brown and sprinkled with tea leaves. She shook it and blew. "You know, Elizabeth, you're right."

"What's going on? Come on, humour me."

Anna straightened the ticket on the table. "You know, you're right. Fanus might not be a patch on my officer friend, but he's solid. How could I not at least give it a chance?" She studied the ticket. "Besides, I do so love Cary Grant. Don't you?"

Chapter 30

The pavement in front of the bioscope was awash in light and above was a giant poster framed in neon. 'Each time they kissed', the tagline announced against a backdrop of red and the faces of Joan Fontaine in a swoon to Cary Grant, 'there was the thrill of love...the threat of murder.' Fanus stood to one side of the entrance, hands clasped behind his back and his chest straining the buttons of his suit jacket. When he saw Anna he smiled, not of surprise or affection but of pride. Then he bowed his head enough to expose his middle parting to the crown.

"Vaderland, but you look beautiful," he said, and kissed her on the lips.

"Thanks." Anna her shoulder but then remembered she was in a strapless dress. Her gaze was diverted to the glint of his shoes. "And you're smart for the cinema. What's the occasion?"

"Does there have to be?" he said. "I'm just pleased you're here."

Three old ladies brushed past them, leaving a trail of mothballs and perfume. One looked up at a poster with the expression of a teenage girl with a crush. Another gave Fanus a dirty look and confided with her friend.

"You're nothing if not persistent," Anna said as they trailed the threesome through the entrance. The foyer had a ruby carpet which was soft underfoot and the walls were adorned with advertisements of coming attractions. Fanus led them to the back of the queue for the snack bar. Ahead, a youngster in a cropped waistcoat and bow tie was plunging a trowel into a stash of popcorn.

"I was surprised when you called," he said.

"How so?" Anna avoided his eyes and smiled at the server. The lad blushed and asked the couple in front of them for their order.

"You've hardly been forthcoming lately, let me put it that way."

"Ag, you know." Anna opened her purse and closed it. She tried to force a blush. "A girl can't resist a man like you forever." She smiled with innocence. "I can't fault you for effort."

Without asking her, Fanus ordered two large popcorns and coca colas in paper cups. "That's how you like it, hey?"

Anna shrugged. "The consummate lawyer. Always knows the answer before asking the witness a question." She shook salt on her popcorn and scooped up the cold-drink. There was something comforting in the familiarity of holding them to her chest and the smell of seasoning and butter.

An usher stood behind a cordon. He looked cadaverous and old enough to be a great grandfather. Every now and again he looped the end of a tussled rope about a stanchion and then unravelled it. As Anna and Fanus approached, he pointed to a notice board above the movie entrance and tapped his watch.

They paused under the poster for *Suspicion*. "I heard it's based on a book," Fanus said. "'Before the Fact'. No doubt you've read it."

Anna elbowed him. "You think I've got all day to lay about consuming novels, don't you?"

"Not all day."

"Fine Art is harder than you think," she said. "Just try three creative projects, simultaneously. And that's not counting the theory. Art is work, you know – just like the law. A mistress every bit as demanding as the High Court. Except there's no judge telling you when to adjourn."

"A mistress, hey." The residue of his smirk lingered in the curl of his lips. "Ja, if only she paid you for your troubles."

Anna dug her fingers into the popcorn. "The reward is in the doing."

"I like that: sounds like one of those quotes you get in a Christmas cracker."

"I'm being serious," she said. "When you are busy with a sculpture – same thing for a painting - every faculty is engaged and it is as if all the brokenness of this world never existed and it all makes sense. How can you put a price to that...? Fine, look at me like that. I don't expect you to understand."

He looked hurt. "I might be a man of commerce but that doesn't mean I don't have an appreciation of the arts."

"Consuming beauty is different to creating it."

His lips suggested a smile. "That's what I love about you. You're so different; you keep me honest."

She lowered her eyes, not trusting her reaction. Her first instinct was to challenge. Call his patronising for what it was. Instead she said, "I'm glad you feel that way. You're not such a bad sort, yourself, you know."

He took the popcorn and coke from her and put them aside. Then he took her hands in his. "I was being serious earlier, you know."

She still didn't back herself to look at him.

"We were made for each other, Anna. I've known it from the time you passed me the note in class in Standard Five. "I think you're cute," you'd written. Remember that? Always did speak your mind. It's a pity I was so shy in those days...We could have been going out since then. Think about it."

Anna focussed on the backs of his hands. They were freckled with tufts of blonde hair and slender - the hands of an intelligent man, more of the lawyer than the farmer. She tried to imagine waking up to them every morning of her life, and his lack of humour. But every compromise has a price. Besides, the idea wasn't entirely unbearable. He had his strengths. Though a holder of narrow views he felt deeply. A patriot, albeit flawed. And rich.

"Oh..." He dropped her hands, checked his watch. "I clean forgot."

She could face him now. "What is it?"

"You must forgive me," he said. "But I'm going to have to leave you." He glanced at the program board. "Just for a minute, promise. One phone call."

Anna tried to feel upset. "But we were having such fun. Chatting like this, feels like old times." At the entrance to the theatre the cadaver was unravelling a rope from a stanchion. "The show's about to start," she said. "What can possibly be so urgent?"

He patted his jacket, fished a coin from a pocket. "Ag man, we had a terrible accident this morning...a rock blast gone to hell." He winced. "One of our workers died, poor bugger; the other's in hospital."

"Oh, I'm so sorry..." She waved toward the door. "Go. Carey Grant can wait."

Relief broke on Fanus' face and he marched to the exit. To pass the time Anna wandered over to a couch near the snack bar and picked up the first magazine from a pile. It was a dog-eared movie guide and she started to leaf it. As she skimmed the captions her mind reviewed her performance. Though she'd felt awkward inside, Fanus appeared to have taken her at face value. There was much to be done between now and the end of the evening, but she was off to a good start.

When she turned the last page of the magazine she had the first pang of worry. How long could it take to pay respects to the wounded? Besides, it was out of character for Fanus to be so concerned about the welfare of his staff. She picked up the next magazine. It was the Horse and Hound with a cover of a fox hunt. She replaced it and, got up for a visit to the bathroom instead.

His voice at her ear jolted her. "I am so sorry."

"Fanus." She swirled about. "That was quick."

"Told you. I hate to miss the start of a film. Especially a thriller."

Next to them, popcorn spluttered to life in its glass cage while the server played piano on his till.

"How is he?"

"Who's that?" Fanus shuddered. "Oh, yes, of course, he's fine. Just slurring his words. But you never know: these guys are hard to understand at the best of times."

"Will he make it?"

Fanus chuckled. "Cracked ribs, pelvis, leg snapped in two. It's a wonder he's still breathing. But he'll live. They always do."

"Oh, stop it. You make it sound like he's an animal."

"There you go again. Always taking their side. A man would swear you loved them more than your own people."

"They are people."

A hub-hub of voices distracted them. Moments later faces appeared from the cinema door. The usher swung the cordon clear and patrons fanned out across the foyer toward the exit. Without exception they were couples, mostly elderly. When the last of them had either detoured to the bathrooms or passed, the usher replaced the cordon and stood sentry.

"How did it happen?" she said.

"What was that again?"

"The accident. You said it was a blast gone wrong."

"That's right."

"Well, isn't it just a question of sticking a piece of dynamite in a hole and lighting a fuse? How's it possible to get stuck under falling rock?"

"You ask me." He laughed. "These guys are capable of anything. You'd swear they had a death wish." When she didn't laugh, he added, "Actually it's a lot more complicated than some Tom and Jerry cartoon where the person stands back and watches the fuse burn. Any number of things can go wrong: a break in the fuse, the angle of lie, a wet patch. It takes years of training to get it right; even then, accidents still happen. Why do you think every farmer and his dog hasn't opened a quarry? Bliksem, there are enough of them with mountain acreage."

"And the dynamite? You use the same stuff you gave Papa that time for Kleinjan to blast the kloof road?"

He eyed her. "Why are you suddenly so interested?"

Only a handful of stragglers hovered about the foyer, waiting for their partners to return from the cloakrooms.

"Ag, its nothing. I was just thinking we'd better be careful next time we try it on the farm. Papa is planning to expand the road up near the dam. You know how proud he is: he wouldn't dream of calling for a professional."

"Prudent man," Fanus laughed. "Just leave it to the foreman."

"That's not funny. A life's not worth a penny to you if it doesn't have a pale skin or blue eyes, does it? Shame on you." She crossed her arms, felt cold. The thought of spending an hour and a half in a dark room with a man of such views filled her with dread. Why hadn't it bothered her before? Was it that he had become more bigoted or she more enlightened? She imagined him reaching for her hand. Perhaps even trying a kiss. Only the clarity of her objective gave her the will to persevere.

"Come now, Anna. What's all this concern about working conditions? Next thing it will be pay. Why bother yourself with them?"

"It's common decency, Fanus. Remember the concept?"

"You're way too soft on these people. Trust me, they won't return the favour. Look how they're threatening to strike, just when your government can least afford it. Not that I care for the government in this case. They deserve it."

The cadaver swapped cordons and prepared the way for the next lot of patrons to enter. The three old ladies wandered past again, averting their gaze.

"That's a distortion," she said. "Don't you read the news? The Communist Party's a hundred percent behind the war effort."

The usher took the tickets from the last of the entrants.

"Gè. That's only because Hitler invaded Russia. Two-faced jackal. The day before they were marching in protest."

"I can't disagree on that one," she said. "But not every worker is a Communist. You know that."

"Just give them a chance. Union bastards. If they come near our business I'll kick their arses to Cairo." Fanus handed the tickets to the usher. "I'm sorry: we shouldn't be arguing about something so silly." He offered his hand. "Can we agree to disagree? Just for tonight."

"Of course." What an indictment on a relationship, Anna thought as she followed him into the darkened cinema, when the peace had to be quarantined.

Inside, the carpets seemed thicker even than in the foyer. The theatre was empty except for with a handful of patrons scattered about at random. Fanus whispered to an usher, who led them down the ramp. They stopped now and again to read the row numbers glowing on the floor. To Anna's dismay, they continued to the back row which was darker and unoccupied. There they sunk into their seats with the popcorn and cokes between them.

First there were silent advertisements, flipping like a slow motion slide show. In one there was a car battery with a cartoon mechanic, shrugging and holding two ends of a jumper lead; in another a glamorous woman blew smoke while clutching a carton of cigarettes on her lap. After the slideshow a handful of trailers ran and then the cinema darkened. Whispers broke out amongst the patrons as they waited to the whirring from the projector room behind them. Once the reels had been changed, the screen flickered to life and an aerial pan of the Hollywood sign appeared, followed by the lion roaring the start of the feature.

"Makes me think of you," Fanus whispered when Joan Fontaine made an appearance. "Quite the lady."

"Stuck up, you mean? Thanks."

"Nee wat, you'll see."

Anna kept her arms to her sides, conscious of his every move. Expecting him to make his move at any time, but happy for the reprieve. Only when the characters of Grant and Fontaine had eloped and come unstuck did his hand settled on her thigh. "Why is it," he said, leaning into her ear. "That a beautiful woman always falls for a cad?"

Anna stiffened. Fanus was telling her something. She berated herself for being taken by surprise; of course nothing he did was without intent. In her mind's eye she ran through the film's plot: prim and proper McLaidlaw, in spite of her parents' warnings, falls for a rascal and, after an attempt at suicide, has a sticky end in prison. No, it wasn't a coincidence that they were watching *Suspicion*. It was a parody of her and Thomas, and a warning. She said, "Ag, it only happens in the movies." She tried a giggle. "We're far more pragmatic in real life."

"You sure of that?"

"How can we be sure of anything?"

"No need to get deep on me again – I was asking a question at face value."

"Oh, come on," she nudged him. "What do you want me to say? Anyway, how would I be able to answer – the men in my life so far have been difficult characters, but decent."

"Ge." His hands were on his lap again, attention on the screen.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

He muttered something, said, "I shouldn't have to spell it out."

"Listen." She poked him in the ribs. "This jealousy doesn't suit; you're a bigger man." She wiggled in her seat. "Of course I've gone out with other people since we broke up. What was I supposed to do: pine away like a princess in a turret waiting until you rode back into my life? You know me better."

"Yes, but a foreigner?"

"All right. If you must know: yes, there was something between Thomas and me. But so what? I meet many men I find attractive. I'm at the prime of my life – it's perfectly normal. And guess what: if we'd been married twenty years the same thing would be happening. It doesn't mean anything comes of it." She sensed it was time to shift gear, put her hand on his knee. "What we have is something way stronger than a childish flutter."

Anna's assurances appeared successful and Fanus settled back into his seat. They held hands but didn't speak again until the film ended. She rose before the credits had completed their roll, and they filed out with the dozen or so other patrons into the light of the foyer.

The snack bar was deserted and there was no sign of the server. When she returned from the bathroom he was waiting for her at the couch.

"I've arranged a car to fetch us," he said. "Five minutes, tops. We may as well relax in the meantime."

Anna sat at the far end of the couch, legs crossed. Fanus sat half way along it, facing her with his arm about the back rest. He waited for the last of the couples to pass and said. "Have you thought further about what I proposed this morning?"

"Huh?"

"You know: you and I...giving it a go?"

Anna inhaled sharply. Waited. A great deal would depend on how she responded. Though she'd rehearsed her words a dozen times on the way to the bioscope she still felt naked and frozen in the moment.

"Well, have you?"

"Do we have to talk about this now?" The first lines carried the biggest risk and had to be nuanced. She could almost hear her heart thumping. "Can't we just enjoy each other's company? Take it one day at a time..."

"Under normal circumstances, I would agree." His eye sockets were sunken and seemed too close together for comfort. "But times are far too strange for that. In fact..." His eyes were somewhere else. "They are about to get completely mad. For a period, in any case."

His palm on hers felt cold for summer and smooth for a farmer. She knew it was important to reel him in slowly. "What do you mean?"

"I can't tell you exactly. You're just going to have to trust me."

Anna stifled a retort but couldn't stop herself wincing. A couple appeared from the theatre exit and wandered past. The man was in his mid-thirties with a confident strut, his hair shorn back and sides; the woman was barely out of her teens with a tight skirt and heels. Their faces were flushed but they weren't holding hands or speaking.

Fanus waited for the pair to drift out to the street. He watched the man slide something into her hand before they parted. Then he said, "I need to know that you're with me, by my side."

Things were taking a turn too fast. Anna needed to play for time. "What do you mean?"

"The war is at a turning point," he said. "In so many places. Take Singapore for example. The garrison is going to surrender any day now. The Japanese will also take India in months, I promise. You don't have to be a prophet to know what will be next...Already they have submarines off Mozambique."

"South Africa?" Anna feigned surprise. "That's preposterous. The sea lanes are way too important. The Allies will never let that happen."

"That's what they said about Manchuria, the Philippines, in fact that lying bastard Churchill is still saying it about Singapore." He shuddered, as if awakening. "Sorry, my skattie: I didn't want to go on a detour about politics. There's something far more important at stake for us." He took her free hand and stepped closer till his suit jacket touched her dress.

"What are you doing?"

He dug into his pocket. Then he was opening a box, then a cloth. "I love you Anna. You have no idea how much." He drew the ring out between his thumb and index finger. Held them up as if for payment. "Will you marry me?"

Anna felt a turn in her stomach. This couldn't be happening – not now, anyway – it would completely derail her plan. She shifted the strap of her handbag further up her shoulder and looked to the usher for salvation. Finding none, she turned back. "You honour me," she said. "I'm over—"

"So you mean you accept?" His Adam's apple bobbed.

"No, I mean...Have you spoken to Papa?"

"Many times. He is hundred percent in agreement."

"One moment," she said, withdrawing her hand. "This is such a big question." She allowed an appropriate pause. "And before I even try to answer, I need you to promise me something."

"My lief," he said. "Anything."

The foyer was empty. Outside, an urchin had his face pressed up to the glass of the window. Anna leaned toward Fanus, her lips almost brushing his cheek. "I know what you're planning," she whispered.

"What..?" He straightened. "What are you talking about?"

"The plot," she said. Confidence was all important now. There was no retreat. "To blow up Parliament."

Fanus looked shaken. "I...I don't...that's the strangest thing I've ever heard."

"Don't play dumb," she said. "I've been in the tunnels, seen the dynamite."

He crimped his head in like a tortoise. "Tunnels? Now, now, slow down."

"That's why you were there, wasn't? Prinsloo Granite's explosives. I saw them myself."

His lips moved before his words. "I don't understand." He looked her up and down. "You mean you were there, crawling about. How could you?"

"You mean: how could I, a woman, don't you?"

His eyes shifted four points of the compass.

"I'm not your average poppie, Fanus. If you're going to marry me you'd better come to terms with it."

"I don't understand." He was recovering his composure, his posture straighter. "When we met for tea this morning: you must have known. Why didn't you say anything?"

"Hang on," she said. "It's me who's owed an explanation."

"How so?"

"Did you expect me to agree to marry you and then discover you're a rebel?"

"A patriot."

She felt a rush of anger. He really did believe his own propaganda. "What's the difference in this case? People die when you blow up buildings. Innocent people."

"Every cause worth fighting for involves sacrifice."

"Words are cheap. Though I suppose for a lawyer that isn't strictly speaking true."

"That's funny," he said without laughing. "No, the time for talking is long past. Where has Malan's blabbering in parliament got us? Nowhere. Worse, we're pouring ever more resources into helping our sworn enemy. Pure blood Afrikaners are dropping in the desert like the flies that lick them."

"Many more would die if your diabolical scheme went ahead. My father, for one."

He held her on both shoulders. "My liefling: our men have been moving mountains to persuade him to boycott the session. Every day another angle. He's a stubborn man."

"So you wash your hands. Just like that. The end justifies the means." Anna shuddered. "Since I heard your voice down there, I've tried so hard to persuade myself otherwise." She shook her head. "You really are a facist. If not a Nazi."

"That's unfair," he said. "All we want is a country our people can call their own. Civilized values. The church."

"You're dreaming," she said. "Van Rensburg, the Great Council, the lot of you. Thinking you can bring back Kruger's Republic. Are we supposed to ride around on horseback again, in wagons? Women in kappies? You're dinosaurs, young but obsolete." Anna watched his face redden and his chest expand. It was gratifying for a moment, until she remembered her mission. "Look. I'm sorry." She closed the gap between them until they were almost touching. "I didn't mean this to become a slinging match. We don't have to agree on politics." She felt him tense. "There's so much more to a successful union, isn't there?"

"You mean that?" His eyebrows rose like petals from the bridge of his nose outwards. "You mean you'll...?"

She made the faintest of contact, breathed in and out so that her breasts expanded and fell beneath her dress. "Ag, Fanus, how can I put this?" She shifted her eyes to one side and then down. "You've been good to me. I know that. And despite everything I might have said in the past year, I'm still fond of you, more so now..." She looked at him from the whites of her eyes. "But I'd be lying if I said I love you."

He recoiled.

"No," she continued. "Hear me out. What is love, really? Sometimes I think deep down it's more a curse than the blessing it's wrapped in." She edged closer until she felt his chest press against hers. "You know, I'm starting to believe you may be right." She watched with growing alarm as his hope swelled. "Perhaps we could have a future together. If only..."

"What is it?" He took her hand. "Come, these people need to close up. Let's talk outside."

It was time for the hammer blow. She felt herself shaking. She said, "I've told them."

Fanus stopped tugging. They were in the entranceway. There were life-size posters in lit frames on either side of them with show times listed on black and white plugboards. He said, "What did you just say?"

"I've told the authorities."

"Told what? What are you talking about?"

She tried to read his mind through his eyes. "The plot against Parliament."

His reaction was calmer than she'd expected, more matter of fact, an absence of denial. "What authorities?"

"Special branch, Pretoria."

Though expressionless, his face looked pale against the backdrop of the street light. "Why?"

"Because I care for you." She waited for the half-truth to settle. A car rumbled past, then another. An Egyptian goose cawed from the stars.

"And you prove it by trying to destroy my life?"

"I didn't mention names," she said. "Just time and place."

"I don't believe you," he said, eyes burrowing in hers. "Why would you be here with me like this if you'd ratted on us? No, you've never been a good liar Anna. You're way too much of an open book."

"I'll take that as a compliment." She shrugged her smile. "Abandon it, Fanus. There's still time."

"Impossible." He scanned the street, fixing on a pair of headlights approaching from around the bend. An unmarked Ford pulled up to the kerb and the rear door swung open. "This is it. Our company car. I tell you what, let's go somewhere we can talk about this some more. I know...let's try Signal Hill. It's such a romantic view from up there. And quiet."

"That would have been lovely," she said, clinging to a lamppost. "But Elizabeth is expecting me. I'll walk for the fresh air. Its only ten minutes, if that."

"Come on," he said, holding the door open and showing her inside. "It's been a big evening, such a lot to talk about. We can't leave things in suspense like this, can we?"

Anna looked inside the car. The back seat was empty. Her better judgement urged her to stay away but she couldn't think of a good enough reason to refuse. More importantly though, her mission was unfinished. Fanus was anything but persuaded. It made her think of her father. Would he really be safe? De Villiers had sounded anything but committal. If nothing else, she needed to stay close to Fanus, learn more.

Inside, the driver mumbled a greeting in English without turning. He was in the uniform of a chauffeur with a peaked hat and short back and sides. Without waiting for instruction, he slipped the clutch and steered them away from the kerb. Though at the time she didn't think much of it, Anna remembered later a taxi switch its lights on and pull out into the road behind them.

Chapter 31

They snaked up Kloof Nek Road in silence and the lights of the suburbs thinned. Anna felt heavy, as if the mountain was on her more with every passing mile of their approach. She couldn't help contrasting it with the earlier trip. Though little more than twelve hours before, it felt like weeks. The splendour of the eagles' tango, a shattered radio...and Thomas' proposal. Just the thought of his name stirred a wave of guilt and she shivered. He'd trusted her with everything. And her response was to betray him, at least in pretence. But the thought that dominated as they crested the Nek on the turning circle and passed the cableway turnoff, was his warning.

Anna felt Fanus' body press against her as they banked right about the circle, past the Camps Bay and Rotunda turnoffs, and hugged left at the shoulder of Lion's Head. From there the road ascended dark and steep through pine boughs and starlight. The windows were open and there were alternating wafts of pine and fynbos resin as the road straightened and then levelled. If it were not for the orange fringe of sky framing the rise ahead, they could have been on the Elim Downs. After a mile or so the city reappeared on their right and then they passed the sign to the Kramat, accelerated along the spine of lion before slowing to bank sharp left around its rump at Signal Hill.

The driver slowed the car to a crawl as the road widened to a parking lot. To the left of the approach, on the mountain side, was a radar tower. It was constructed of steel lattice with a red light at its apex and alongside it stood a Bedford truck without lights. To their right and ahead a low wall fronted the lot and behind it was a band of light speckles and dark blotches and then the ocean. There wasn't even the stirring of a breeze and a sliver of moon had risen to cast a dress train of glimmer to the shore.

"Here is fine," Fanus said to the driver as they drew to a halt in front of the wall. "Come, Anna, let's stretch our legs."

"What are we doing here?" she said before accepting his hand. Though Signal Hill was known as a place for a romantic interlude, something didn't feel right. Perhaps it was the lateness of the hour, or the lack of company.

"As I said before, we need to talk."

Through the side mirror, Anna saw a flicker of reflected light on the tower but then it was gone and the lot was dark again. Something wasn't quite right, she thought, summoning the will to get out.

"Come." His hand helped her out. When the door clicked shut her anxiety was momentarily forgotten in the peace of lights twinkling and the growl of distant waves. She trailed him to the edge of the lot and settled next to him on the wall, legs dangling at the view. Far below there were lights scattered among the ink blobs of the blackout.

"So what happens next?" he said after a long silence.

"That's a strange question."

"Well, I mean it. What do we do next?"

"You just asked me to marry you. Shouldn't you be taking the lead?"

"That would be right," he said. "If you were a normal sort of girl. Waiting on your man, I mean."

"What is that supposed to mean? I don't like your tone of voice, you know. Is it something I've said?"

"You could put it that way." He breathed in to his full size, seated. "Why did you have to speak to De Villiers, hey?"

A breeze was easing down the slope and Anna crossed herself to rub goosebumps from her arms. For the first time in the evening her anxiety took a turn to fear. "I said I spoke to the police. Who said anything about a De Villiers?"

He propped himself straight using his hands on the wall beneath, and his legs stopped swinging. "I have a little confession to make," he said. "My men convinced me they needed to tap your phone lines."

"You what?" she thought of the conversation with De Villiers. The crackle on the line. "But how...?" Elizabeth. The visit. Of course she'd invite him in.

"Your friend is something else, hey," Fanus smiled at the memory. "Do you know she propositioned me before I'd even finished my tea? Don't look so worried: we never did anything, not more than a bit of a cuddle, is all it was. It was a necessary evil."

Anna felt overwhelmed. Too much had happened in so short a time. She had to compose herself before answering. Fall back on the stratagem of attacking when in doubt. "How could you, you..."

"The more relevant question is: how could we not? Imagine, with you blowing our plans out of the water like that. We'd be finished, man. In prison or hanging. I admit, I felt bad giving permission for the tap. But now? Hell, no. If anything, I was too trusting."

Anna felt an urge to get away. Like her claustrophobia, except in open air. She was trying to remember what she'd said to De Villiers. "Give it up, Fanus. They know too much already. Going ahead now would be suicide and you know it."

"Forget it. There is too much at stake. But there's a better way." He edged closer until their legs touched. "I understand why you had to do it – sell us out, that is."

"Ag, he knew already. Apparently there are files on every one of you. If you'd listened properly to the conversation, you would know."

"Ge, really? Then why were you going to meet tomorrow, hey, you tell me? But don't worry, liefing, I understand why you did it. To protect your father. It's all right. Any opregte Afrikaner would have done the same thing: family before anything, except maybe God. I'm proud of you." He took her hand. "I meant what I said earlier. You're the only woman I've ever loved. Be my wife, Anna van der Vliet. Together we can achieve greatness."

"I couldn't think of a worse fate." She ripped her hand and sprung off the wall, started toward the car. "I'm going."

"Stop acting like a child," he called after her. "I beg you. Be reasonable. It doesn't have to be like this, there is a future..."

The car shook as she jumped into the back seat and slammed the door shut. "To the bioscope," she said, trying not to sound panicked. "I'll pay you whatever you want. Just hurry."

The driver adjusted his cap but otherwise stayed put.

"Go," she shouted.

He didn't budge. Anna hammered her fist on the seat back. "Move, damn it. What's wrong with you?"

Fanus appeared at the front passenger window and tapped on the glass. The driver leaned across and wound down the window. "Plan B, I suppose."

Anna froze at the accent. By now she would recognise it in her sleep, or rather her worst nightmare. "Kurt?"

He turned. It was the first time she'd seen him smile and she wished it was the last. "We see each other again. I am sorry it is not under more favourable circumstances." He waited for Fanus to slip into the front seat beside him, fired the ignition and put the engine into reverse.

As they neared the far end of the lot, Anna noticed two other cars, parked several widths apart and overlooking the ocean. One had an interior light on, albeit dim. Anna cleared her throat to scream.

"Looks like your sidekick is having a sleep," Kurt was facing Fanus. "I thought you said he was dependable."

"Why do you have to think the worst of people?" Fanus, said. "PJ's back at base. He's a good man. You'll see."

Anna started to feel desperate now, thought of rolling out. They couldn't have been going faster than ten miles an hour. She could make a dash for the bushes. Then the car was bouncing and they were on gravel and then open veld. To their left was the intermittent fringe of pine trees silhouetting the lion's back and opposite, a hedge of fynbos.

"There is nowhere to go," Kurt said, as if reading her mind. "You are not to attempt escape."

"Escape?" She leaned forward, pulling on the seat back. "Am I a prisoner now?"

He coughed. "That is correct."

She tapped Fanus on the shoulder. "Tell me that's not true. Come on."

Fanus stared out the open window. The wind was stronger now, south-southwest by the looks of the trees, and cold.

"This is nonsense," she said, ripping at the back door handle. Using her foot, she managed to force the door open a few inches but it was pushed back by the wind. "Let me out. I insist."

Kurt turned about to Fanus. "Your friend is a difficult one, nicht so?"

"That's enough," Fanus said to him. "Remember, every courtesy, even with Plan B." The car was bumping down a slope, getting steeper. In the distance and below was the overbite of the Sea Point promenade and a panorama of ocean.

The car braked in fits as a thicket of Port Jackson approached. Kurt switched the ignition off and killed the lights. The engine sighed heat and they waited. Ahead and below, a rectangular structure materialised from the dark; it had a concrete slab for a roof and a steel door. After a minute or two the door opened a crack followed by a torchlight flashing, then closed again.

"Wait here." Kurt stepped out the car and marched toward the bunker.

The door swung open and the figure of a man with a long beard filled the doorway. A rifle was slung diagonally across his chest. He shifted on his feet as Kurt approached. Without shaking hands they proceeded to confer in hushed tones, glancing back to the car every so often.

"That's Pieter-Johannes," Fanus said, as if wanting to fill the silence. "He was in first year at Stellenbosch with me. Dropped out and joined the police. Now he's with us. A good man."

"How can any of this be good?" Anna said. "Murdering innocent people."

Fanus sighed. "Who calls it murder? Its war. There's a difference. War is all hell."

"William Tecumseh Sherman," she said. "Irony of ironies, wouldn't you say? For you to be quoting a Yankee general. I would have thought you'd be more impressed with Stonewall Jackson."

"Yes, but he lost. Died, too. In any case, I thought you're be impressed that with me quoting from one of your hero's lackeys. Didn't they free their blacks, after all?"

"Ag, stop it."

There was a rap on the window and Kurt's face appeared, ghost-like in the moon-silvered light. "Alles ist in ordnung."

Fanus stepped out of the front and opened her door. "Come, my lief."

"Don't you dare call me that."

"Come on," he said, "We really have to be going inside."

Anna tensed. She had no intention of moving. "Listen. There's something I want to clear up."

His hand went limp but remained extended. "What is that?"

"Back there. Kurt talked about Plan B. Were you really planning to lock me up if I didn't agree to marry you, go along with your madness?"

He sank to his haunches to look her in the eyes. "You must understand: I don't act alone. There are others, dozens, no hundreds – not to mention the volk – who depend on the success of this operation." He picked her hand off her lap. "There is still time. I promise you won't regret it. There's a great future for us. You must believe me. Just give me your word and all this will go away."

Kurt shoved his knee into the opening, causing her hand to fall from his. "Raus," he said. "Macht schnell."

Fanus rose to face him. "That's enough German," he said. "You're in South Africa."

Anna pressed herself against the far seatback. Waited for the close-set eyes to peer into the car. "Don't touch me," she said, slapping his hand as it reached in.

"Scheiße." Kurt withdrew it in a flash. "Here, Fanus, you sort your girl out. Remember, there is not a lot of time."

Fanus' face appeared again, pleading. "Just come now," he said. "You'll understand everything tomorrow. I'll give you another chance, promise."

"To hell with your promises," she said, shaking off his hand. "I'm not going anywhere."

The ground crunched outside. "Enough," Kurt called out. "You know where to you have to be now, Fanus. PJ: kommt hier."

There was harder crunching and the bearded giant's face appeared. His breath smelt of meat and garlic and his grip dismayed resistance. She felt a bolt of pain up her shoulder and in an instant she was out of the car with her wrists behind her back. "Don't you dare," she shouted. Then the building was approaching in jolts as he marched her toward the doorway. Through the crack in the entranceway she could make out a candle inside, beside a single bed. "You'll never get away with this." They were on the stairs now. The door was corrugated iron braced by angle irons and heavy on its hinges "They know everything."

PJ laughed and his breath from behind her was warm and foul. Behind him, Fanus was in the car, revving, and then gone.

"Ask Fanus. It's true. You don't have a chance. I told the police everything."

"De Villiers, you mean."

She wriggled to free herself but the big man's grip was unyielding.

"Don't be fooled," he said. "Our people are everywhere."

Anna swore to herself to dispel the gnawing dread. Was de Villiers compromised? How foolish to take him at his word. It was common knowledge that many in the police force were sympathetic to the Ossewa Brandwag's cause, if not active members.

The giant forced Anna up the steps and through the entrance. Inside, it smelled of urine and charcoal and the only furniture was the bed and a table, barely distinct in the light of the single candle.

Without warning she was shoved, stumbling and fell on the bed. Her face was pressed into the blanket; it itched her face and smelled of dust so she rolled over and quickly sat up

The giant was gone and Kurt stood in the doorway. His smile was as cold as it was brief. "You mustn't be so hard on your boyfriend," he said. "He really does love you. It's just that he loves his country more."

Anna spat at his shoes.

"That was not necessary." Kurt bent down and wiped the tip of his shoes with his sleeve. "This is not how a lady behaves, oder?" He straightened, stepped back. Behind him and outside, the giant stood erect, facing away.

"If you are thinking of escape," Kurt said, feeling for the door behind him. "Do not waste your time. My friend here tells me this bunker was designed to stop the Kriegsmarine. There is no chance a girl like you can do better."

The door clanged shut, and after it there was the click of a padlock. One pair of footsteps trailed off and then the only sound was the wind teasing the doorway. Anna felt the walls closing in on her, pressing her down on the bed. The only way she knew to relieve the oppression was distraction so she bounced gently to test the bed. It was firmly sprung, knee-height and covered with a green blanket. On the table beside it was a jug of water and a glass. She filled the glass, sniff tested it and drank. Then she stood, her head just shy of the concrete roof, tracing the soot ring cast by the candle. The room was just longer than the bed and three-quarters as wide. A couple of feet from the

door was a rectangle in the wall messed with steel. On closer inspection it looked like it had once been a window, now bricked. She stood in front of the door, hammering her fists on the steel, her spirits sinking with every blow. When it felt like they were bleeding she stopped. Kurt had been right. There was no escaping.

As she was about to lie down on the bed, there was the sound of the car sputtering into life. Then its headlights lit a wire frame about the door for a second, brightened and faded with the scrunching of tires and it was still again. Instead of stretching out, she got up, and paced back and forth, thinking.

"Pieter-Jonannes," she called out in desperation.

There was silence, then a match striking and the gush of flame.

"I know you're there." She switched to Afrikaans. "Answer me."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I am under instructions not to talk to you."

"I need to go to the bathroom."

"The sound of a match flaring and a pause. "There's a bucket. Other side of the bed. And paper."

"Sies. That's terrible. You'd let a lady go through that? Come on, I know you're a better man than that."

There was a shifting of feet on gravel and the wind.

"Listen," she said. "I know you think you're just doing your duty."

"Shh." The wind whistled under the door.

She waited for what felt like a minute. "You're a patriot, aren't you? Just like my father."

The wind sucked and went silent.

"You know him, don't you? Van der Vliet. MP for Bredasdorp."

There was a scent of tobacco, rich and sweet, but no response.

"Why do you want to go down with these people," she said. "You must know the plot cannot succeed. Trust me, the government has infiltrated every cell of your movement, even the Great Council itself. They know everything."

"Now you are lying," he said, voice as rough as bark.

"I was there myself," she continued. "In parliament, this week. General Smuts said himself they have the OB in the hollow of their hand. All the names. That the army is just waiting for an excuse to round them up. You have a sweetheart, PJ? Children? Think of them before you throw it all away." There was no response. Anna hoped in the silence against hope. The smell of tobacco grew stronger and then waned.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "But I can't help you."

Anna stretched out on the bed and lay staring at the slab. She'd thrown her last hook and it had come up empty. Her thoughts turned into a hailstorm of regret and self-condemnation. Her father's warnings, Fanus, even Thomas. What vanity to go it alone, to think she, a mere girl, could defy them? Even the wind sighing through the trees outside failed to sooth her sense of hopelessness. In the end, only a great weariness, could weigh her to a fitful sleep.

Chapter 32

At first she fought the flicker about the door for a dream, and only when it brightened did she wake. She was up in a flash, eye pressed against the frame to make out a segment in shades of black through the crack. From the crunch of gravel and purring it became obvious that it was a car which, from the muted clunk of a door opening and closing, stopped some way off. Nothing happened for a long minute until footsteps approached with caution. It was strange. Who would possibly be poking their nose about an abandoned bunker in the middle of the night? Then the lock outside the door jingled and someone tugged at the door. Anna held her breath, not trusting herself to answer.

"Miss Anna. Are you there?"

In a tug of war day of surprises, his familiar voice was the pull-down surge. "Kleinjan?"

There was a silence. It was as if the wind had relented for breath. "Yes it's me. Are you all right?"

Still not believing, Anna shuddered. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"There's no time. Don't worry, I'll go for help. It's going to work out, Miss Anna. I promise. I..."

The lock jingled to a standstill and even the wind was dead. Then boots scrunched closer on the gravel.

"Go," she urged through the door frame. "The guard. He's..."

There was a muffled shout and a scuffle, then all was quiet. Anna couldn't bear to learn what had happened. She waited to the sound of her heartbeat.

The lock wiggled and the door swung open. The moonlight was bright behind the hulk. "The bliksem," PJ said. "He bit me." He had Kleinjan in a bear hug from behind. Her mentor's head was slumped over the bigger man's forearm and he wasn't moving. "These people are like animals."

"You...What have you done?"

"Not enough." PJ lifted Kleinjan off the ground, shuffled into the room and let him slump to the floor in front of her. "The bastard deserves a good beating." Then he got out and thumped the door shut. "Don't worry. He'll come around soon enough. May lose a few brain cells, but that isn't a problem."

Anna waited for the lock to click and the footsteps to fade, and then dropped beside Kleinjan's body, which was in the foetal position, barely moving. She felt at his neck for a pulse which was weak. Then she turned him onto his back and cleared his airway. "Kleinjan, oh Kleinjan, tell me you're going to be all right."

The body gave a groan and there was movement in one leg. Her spirits rose. Still on his side, Kleinjan struggled his head to his hand.

"Magtig jong, you gave me a fright," she said. "You all right?"

"Everything is good," he said. "I just passed out."

"Look," she held up her hand to the candle. "You're bleeding."

He ran his hands down his cheeks, padded his sides. "I am fine. It must be the boer's."

"Serves the bully right." Anna studied the contours of his face in the candlelight. His cheekbones were high and shining, dimples boomeranged about his shrivelled mouth. Then she said, "It was you, wasn't it? Following us from the theatre."

He nodded.

"Why though?"

His face dropped until she could see the scar of a knife wound on his forehead. It was lighter than the surrounding skin and reflected the candlelight. "I'm not supposed to say."

There was only one explanation. "It's Papa, isn't it?"

He crinkled his eyes in a blink, then nodded. "Baas Stefan, he...told me to find you. He said you've been acting strangely."

Anna remembered the cable car, her message to the conductor. "What else did he say?"

Kleinjan glanced nervously at the door. "I've already said too much."

Anna sat down on the floor next to him, back against the bed. "Look at us...locked away on some Godforsaken koppie waiting for the end of all we know to happen when it's in our power to stop it and you're worried about your job? Jong, if we don't do something, there'll be no Rietvlei. Forget about a foreman."

He rubbed the peppercorn stubble of his chin. "You're right...You've always seen things clearer, even as a little girl."

"That's only because you taught me how to think."

He flashed a smile. "It's Baas Stefan. Jho, I've never seen him so angry."

Anna laughed. "It must be bad. Tell me, what did he say to you? About me. It's important you remember his actual words, as closely as possible."

He looked at the candle with eyes in another country. "Hai, you know how I am, can't even remember Hannah's birthday."

"Come on, you have to try."

He ran his finger through the flame and back again. "Let me think...Yes, he said you were..."

"What's wrong?"

"I can't say it, Miss Anna. It isn't right."

"Come on, this isn't the time to be shy. What did he say?"

"He called you a lying whore..." Kleinjan turned away. "Yes, those were his words. Something about you running off with 'that German'. He said he warned you. That he's going to...No, I can't..."

"Tell me. I'm a grownup now. I can take the truth."

"You mustn't make a judgement too soon." Kleinjan wet his lips with his tongue. "You know how he sometimes overreacts, says things he doesn't mean."

"Stop. You don't have to protect him. Just say it as it is."

Kleinjan looked at her this time. "Your father wants you to stop university."

"What?" In retrospect Anna was surprised at how shallow her anger had been buried. She leapt to her feet. It felt like the ceiling was lower now, pressing in on her. "First he threatens my inheritance. Now my future." She kicked at the door. "He's a rogue. No, that's too kind." She took the two paces to the far wall and spun about, repeated it. "And when was all this supposed to happen?"

Kleinjan lifted himself to the bed. "Before term starts. I'm to drive you back to Rietvlei tomorrow, first light."

Anna scoffed. "Well at least we can safely say that isn't going to happen." She paced several times, making an effort to control her breathing. Then she sat down next to him on the bed, both looking toward the door. "It's not your fault," she said. "You're just doing what you have to."

They sat for a long time, listening to the wind complain, in turns, at the door.

"What's wrong?" he said when there was a pause outside.

"I'm sorry," she sniffed. "I shouldn't be...I'll pull myself together. It's just...all been too much."

They continued, sitting without words.

"It's what I love about you," she said at last. "You never push me, tell me what to do."

He patted her on the knee, removed his hand. "Sometimes a person just needs someone to listen to."

There was a scratching from beneath the bed. "Gats" Anna raised her feet. "What was that?"

Kleinjan bent down to look. "A rat. A baby, nogal. Shame."

Anna drew her feet onto the bed, crossed her arms about her legs. "Shame be damned. Kill it!"

He laughed. "That's the Miss Anna I remember. Unafraid to take on the world, poep bang for a rodent." He then proceeded to corner the animal and crush it against the wall using the frame of the bed. There was a high-pitched squeal and a whine which took forever to fade.

"What did you mean just now?" Kleinjan said at last. "You said tomorrow was going to be the end of things as we know it. My job. Rietvlei."

Anna hesitated. Her father, Fanus, Thomas - every man she'd trusted in the past week had betrayed her.

"Haai, Miss Anna, you yourself told me this isn't the time to be shy. I told you everything..."

"You never miss a beat, do you?" She smiled and waited. "Ag, all right, I suppose there is nothing to lose...Magtig, where do I start. Do you remember last Thursday on the way to the farm: we were talking about the OB, the nonsense they are up to, the bombings?"

He nodded.

"And that Robey Leibrandt business last year: the Nazi Boer?"

“Ja, sort of. Remind me.”

“That’s the policeman who became a boxer and stayed in Germany after the Olympics.”

“Oh, ja. They dropped him off in Namaqualand to meet up with the OB and others and lead an Afrikaner rebellion. They caught him, didn’t they? In a shootout with the police.”

“That’s it. And the whole thing fizzled out – they say he was betrayed by van Rensburg himself. Now he’s been convicted of treason - although Papa says he’ll get the pardon. Apparently his father served with Smuts in the Vryheidsoorlog.

Kleinjan frowned. “Excuse me, Miss Anna, but why is this important?”

“I’m getting there. You see, it turns out this Leibrandt business was just the fin of the shark. There’s a much more serious threat to our country out there than the odd fanatic. And you know what? We’re swimming right in the middle of the stream.”

His eyes danced, then settled. “You mean the business of the U-boats at Rietvlei?”

She nodded.

“He whistled a breath. “Haai, I know I shouldn’t have, I—”

“Ssh...I don’t blame you anymore. Anyone in your position would have done the same. What you must understand though, is how much more there is to this than fresh meat and vegetables”

The lines on his forehead deepened.

“You know that...” She glanced at the door. “That ogre out there? He’s OB, with Fanus, or some splinter group, I don’t know. And they’re planning to blow up Parliament, can you believe that? Tomorrow nogal. Yes, I know it sounds ridiculous, but it’s true. I was there, in the tunnels, felt the dynamite with my own hands. And you can guess who’s behind them, can’t you? The Germans.”

Kleinjan looked at her with mountain pool eyes. “Thomas?”

Anna shook her head. “He assures me he doesn’t know the first thing about it. And I believe him. Ag, it’s complicated, but you said it yourself at Elim: Kurt is the danger man. Thomas says he’s not from the navy, like the rest of the crew. Sicherheitsdienst or something. That’s German Intelligence. A spy master if you must.”

He stood slowly, stretched. “Jho, that’s a lot to take in.” His hands touched the roof and then fell. “And Baas Stefan? Does he know about all this?”

“I don’t think so...” Anna’s breath cut short. There was something troubling her, a barb from her conversation with de Villiers. “Tell me,” she said. “When did you last see him?”

“Let me think.” Kleinjan counted on his fingers. “I would say ten pm, maybe nine-thirty. Why?”

Anna worked back through the sequence of events to the phone call. De Villiers had mentioned a meeting with his boss. That would account for him not having arrested her father yet. Still, a portent niggled. She said, “Where was he, when you spoke to him?”

Kleinjan’s eyes fell to his feet.

Anna felt that fear which drains the will to act. “Come on, jong, its important.”

He rocked on his heels. "I...I know you don't approve of her...You know the woman from the library?"

"Margriet?" Anna wanted to scream to counter the dread. "Tell me I'm not hearing this. You're saying he's at that woman's house? Tonight? For how long, all night?"

He nodded, still staring at his feet. "I know it's hard for you, Miss Anna, but your father, he's been alone for so long, this is good for him, this—"

"No, it's not that. It's true I don't like her: she's a gold digger – a blind jockey on a galloping thoroughbred could see that. But if she makes him happy, I'll accept it. No, it's so much bigger than that, it's..."

Anna told him about the tunnels, the dynamite and her trek across the mountain. The only details she left out were Thomas' proposition to join him on the boat.

"You see," she said when finished. "Papa had to be at home tonight, otherwise he'll be in Parliament tomorrow and that will be too awful, we have to stop him, please..."

Kleinjan didn't respond.

She was fighting her tears from spreading. "What are we going to do?" She cried. "It's hopeless."

He put his hand on her shoulder and then withdrew it. "Don't be anxious, Miss Anna. With God, there is always hope."

She sat on the edge of the bed. "I used to be so sure of that. But now...I don't know anymore."

He sat down close by her. "Now, now. Has he ever let you down? No. That isn't possible. And he won't today. Be strong and very courageous."

Anna looked at him through a blur. "Ja, that may be so, but why does he always seem so far away. Especially when you're hurting. It's as though he doesn't care, like he's the Bredasdorp Primary headmaster, just standing there waiting for a person to fail."

"I know, I know. It can feel like that. But there is something you must remember: a person's view of God comes from their human father."

A wave of memories broke her heart and she wept without shame.

Kleinjan sat next to her and put his arm about her shoulder. "Baas Stefan is a hard man," he said when her sobbing had stopped. "And I know you can't believe it now – especially with him threatening you like he's doing now – but he loves you. You're the apple of his eye, Miss Anna. Really."

"But that's just the problem," she said. "I don't want to be his little bird, some object of his affection. She wiped her face on her sleeve and turned toward him. "I, I..." She was still heaving. "I want his respect."

They sat next to each other for a spell, staring at the door. Every now and again the wind would rise to a crescendo and blow some fragment of leaf through the gap. At last he spoke. "You know, you mustn't take it to heart. Sometimes I think the only person he respects is himself. It's not that he means to talk down on a person, he just does."

Anna hadn't thought about it that way before but it made sense. Perhaps he was more unable than unwilling to give what she'd been craving from him all these years. Had she misunderstood him so badly all these years? Just then there was a gust from outside and something blew up against her feet. It was a feather, broken at the stem. She picked it up and ran it across her nose. The tickle reminded her she could still feel and it was good.

"What are you doing?" he said.

"Oh nothing. It's just...never mind." Anna was thinking of a flat mountain and a line in the sea and the first man she had ever loved and she was weeping again. Then she rose from the bed. "There's only one way," she said. "We must get out of here." She stepped to the door. "The question is: how?" Then she put her ear to the metal, thinking she'd heard a shuffle of footsteps some way off, and all was still.

"We'll think of something," Kleinjan said. "In the meantime we should get some rest. Tomorrow is another day."

"I suppose you're right." She took the blanket, folded it in half lengthways and laid it out on the floor. Then she stretched herself out on the bed. "I'll try."

Kleinjan lay on his side on the floor, and they fell to their thoughts. In time the candle became a lump of wax on the base of the saucer and the rings of light on the ceiling faded to one. Outside, the wind's tone had changed from a whine to moaning and the moon lit the door frame.

"You are should be sleeping," he said, after an eternity of turning, "You're going to need the energy."

"I know," she said. "But my mind is all over the place."

"You thinking of Thomas, aren't you?"

"I can't help myself."

"It's normal. You're in love."

"It's not just that. I'm worried about him. I mean, what if he fails and they catch him? How could we live with ourselves if we'd sat her doing nothing knowing the fate of our country is in the hands of...an enemy soldier?"

"I don't know. But remember, it's not man who holds the fate of nations."

"Ja, I know, I know – but still, surely God uses people, simple people sometimes, like us, to achieve his purposes. I mean, how else does it work?"

"Miss Anna is right: he will give us what we need and when. We must just have faith."

She sighed. "Don't you sometimes wish it was simpler? That there'd be a sign showing us which way or a booming voice. I miss the old days, you know. When it was Willem, and the klonkies running about the werf until our feet were raw, knowing that there were other people to make the decisions. Do you think that's what happens when a girl gets married? That there's someone to carry her burdens."

"Ja-nee. There will always be some things a woman has to bear alone. I think of Hannah before we met."

Anna could scarcely contain her anguish. "But why?" she cried. "Why does it have to end? We love each other. It's so unfair."

At first Kleinjan didn't respond. His breathing was slow and rhythmical. "Ai, but it's hard, I won't lie," he said. "I should know. I lost my first love, too. My Jinne, it was terrible. The pain. It felt like I was going to die."

"But it's just so cruel," she said. "We're made for each other: we think alike, laugh at the same things. It's like he can read my mind and I, his."

"Ja. That's what it's like."

"Yes, but why did it have to stop, just like that? No time to even say a proper goodbye. It's all so awful. And this war. Magtig, when will it be over?"

He blew through his teeth. "I don't know. But that's why we always have to look for the beautiful things in this life. Take now: we're talking again: properly I mean. Like in the old times, when you and Willem used to play clay-lat together, shooting ketty. Aitsa, you were a tomboy then if ever was one. And look at you now. Like a beauty queen."

"And there's still the charmer in you, nê?" Beauty? Anna was laughing on the surface but he'd said something which fuelled a train of thought. Wanting to let it run she fell quiet and listened to the wind outside bend trees to its fury.

Chapter 33

Sleep came on her in waves in the end, and she was half in it, and half out through the night until the stirring of birds outside welcomed the dawn. Then there was no sleeping as she lay ruminating on the plan which had taken form during the night.

"Kleinjan," she whispered, crouching at his frame. "Wake up."

"I'm here, Miss Anna. Never was asleep."

"I've got an idea." She stood and pressed her face to the door. Then she ran her eyes around the crack of the door frame. At lock height it was a quarter inch wide and she could see the orange light of dawn flooding the horizon outside. "One minute." She put her ear to the opening this time. The wind was dead and she could hear the big man's snore overlaid on the twittering.

"Listen," she said, settling on the bed. "When PJ wakes up I'm going to distract him. It's only going to be good for a minute or two. You must slip away."

He got up and peered through the crack. "I understand. But do you see how far it is to the nearest bush?"

"Ja, I saw that. There's a risk. I'm not going to force you to do this."

"You're right," he said. "There isn't any other way. A man doesn't know what will happen to us if we do nothing. And then there is your father, and the Parliament. Ja, I say we can't depend on the German. There's still something fishy about his story. But tell me, how are you going to create the gap?"

"Don't worry." She stood, teasing her hair. "I know how his type works. More muscle than mind."

"And if you don't come right?"

"Then we both die." She ironed the front of her dress with her hands. "But at least we tried. Listen: I've thought about it carefully. First, run for that clump of proteas, to the right of the entranceway, the one you can just see from here. Then crawl to the top of the ridge. They won't see you from this angle."

Kleinjan looked at her sceptically.

"Yes, I know there's a danger. But once you're on the road you should be fine. Just bundu bash across the spine of the lion, through those pine trees we see on the horizon from town. There's a single row, maybe double. Anyway, if I'm not mistaken you back left toward Signal Hill parking lot after you get to the tar road. There's a service road somewhere on the right, going down to the Bo-Kaap."

Kleinjan nodded. "I know my way around from there."

"You must find De Villiers, he's our best chance." She made him repeat the address of his office. "Tell him everything."

"But what if he's one of them? You yourself said there was a chance he's OB."

"True," she said. "But something tells me he can be trusted. Rough, but a rose bush at heart."

"I agree, from what you told me. But let's just say this works and I get there: why would he believe me?"

Anna stared at him. "Why ever not?"

He coughed. "You see, I'm just a...ag, Miss Anna, I'm a coloured. What's a policeman going to listen to my story for? He'll probably arrest me."

She thought about it. "All right....I tell you what. Tell him I sent you. That I'm sorry I missed his moerkoffie, that I have the case of the century for him, that it's even bigger now."

Kleinjan stretched himself out on the floor again. "Ja, its not perfect but its probably the best chance we've got. I'll do it."

They lay in silence, drifting in and out of consciousness until the sun had lit and started to warm the room. As if to an alarm, she sprung out of bed.

"Right. Are you ready? We mustn't leave it too late." When he was up she started thumping her fists against the iron. "Hey, are you there?" she shouted.

"What is it now?" PJ was up close; she could hear him breathing.

"I need to get out. Now."

"Sorry, ma'am. I'm under strict instructions."

"Listen: I need to go to the bathroom. It's been all night. I can't take it anymore."

There was a pause. "That's what the bucket is there for."

"What? You expect me to do my business on the floor in front of another man. Sies. It's not right."

There was no response. "We didn't expect that buggar." Then a sigh. "All right: when I open, you walk out – slow as I say - and close the door behind you. Understand?"

After the jingle of the lock the door swung half open. She stood in the frame, making as if to rub her eyes. She'd been right. Beyond the steps was fifteen feet of gravel and then low bush. A similar distance beyond that was the thicket of proteas and higher up the slope, the pine. PJ stood clear of the door's swing with a revolver in his hand. She stepped off the stair toward him. "Thank you. You're doing the right thing. Where do I go?"

As he indicated left with his head his beard followed in whiplash. "The outhouse. Slow, remember. I'm watching you."

She tousled her hair so that it fell across her shoulders. "Do me a favour will you?" She said in Afrikaans, and moved closer. Then she turned her back and reached up behind herself as if trying to undo a button. "This thing got stuck last night."

"I shouldn't be doing this." He shifted on his feet. There was the tinkle of the key settling in his pocket. He moved toward her without footsteps and the only warning he was upon her was his fingers fumbling at the button. The garlic on his breath was worse than the night before and this time it was laced with brandy. Suddenly she was shaking. Did a woman feel like this before she is raped?

"Thank you," she said, turning. Her hands strayed to the front of her dress and upward until they cupped her breasts. PJ was clearly trying to stay calm but his eyes couldn't help but focus on her cleavage. She allowed the hint of a smile to tease her lips.

There was a shuffle of footsteps behind her so she spoke. "It must be lonely up here, hey."

"Ag, it's not so bad," he said. "I haven't been posted here long. Less than a month."

"Still." She bent a fraction further forward, watching his pupils widen.

"Hey," he called, head jerking up. "What's that?" His hand was at his revolver.

"What's the matter?" Anna shifted to block his view.

He shoved her out the way. "Can you believe the little bastard...?" he muttered. "Hê. Stop." He was taking aim as he shouted. She stepped in the way again. This time he threw her toward the door. "I said stop, onnosel."

Anna recovered her footing in time to see Kleinjan dive for the protea. The shot was so loud it deafened her momentarily but then she heard the scream. It subsided to a whimper and then it was quiet. Only when she looked down did she realise the hem of her dress was wet. "No," she cried and stooped to pick up a rock at her feet. Without thinking she hurled it at the giant. It hit him in the gut, pulling his next shot right.

"Fok." He grabbed her by the hand and swung her into a vice grip behind her back. Then he frog-marched her back to the bunker and chucked her onto the bed. "You think you're clever, don't you? That's what comes from trusting you half-breed Englishwoman. Now you can stay where you belong."

"But what about Kleinjan?" she shouted, bouncing up from the bed. "You can't just leave him out there to die."

"Don't you worry, he won't be going anywhere."

She felt his presence before his shadow covered the pillow. The door thudded closed and his breathing was the only sound. Anna couldn't break the fear to move and lay still, hoping it was a nightmare.

"Right. Where were we just now?" His knee bumped against the door.

"Don't you dare...You know what will happen if Fanus hears you've so much as touched me..."

"Shut-up. You started this." His belt buckle clanked.

She shifted toward the wall, rolling herself into a foetal position.

"Don't worry," he said, taking another step. "I'm big, but I can be gentle."

Anna was screaming but there were no words at first, just rage and fear and not believing. She heard his pants drop to the ground and then his hand was over her mouth and she was hoping not to be consciousness to feel the end.

Next thing his hand relaxed its grip. Far behind her there was the sound of a car engine. "Lucky bitch." PJ's voice was retreating. "Here comes your lover boy." His hand was under her and flipped her over. Then he was fastening his buckle and he said. "Now, listen here. If you say anything of this I'll kill you. You and your old boyfriend."

Anna stood unmoving by the bed, PJ at the door.

"What's going on here," Fanus said.

"What isn't going on is the better question," PJ said. "Your friend here let that little hotnot bastard get away. Gave me some bullshit story about choking. How could I ignore it? And hey, what took you so long? It's almost midday. There's fokol time left."

Fanus pulled a fob watch from his suit pants. "Relax," he said. "There's time. You know how bad the traffic can get in the mornings." He panned the room. "What's this about a hotnot?"

PJ explained how he'd caught Kleinjan and his version of the escape.

Fanus swung about to survey the veld. "Better go find him," he said. "I'll keep an eye on things here."

PJ eyed him, glanced at Anna and back. "I'm sure you will."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing." There was a pounding on gravel, growing softer.

"What happened to you?" Fanus said, pointing at her dress.

She blushed. "That horrible man didn't let me go to the bathroom."

Fanus' cheeks reddened. "I'm sorry, my lief. I shouldn't have left you with him. But everything...has to be just right. You can imagine: there's no room for a mistake."

She stepped out of the shadows to the light of the doorway, eyes locked on his. "There's still time to call it off..."

"We've been through this, Anna. I'm committed."

"You're not like that Nazi. I won't believe it."

"You're right on that score. I'm no Nazi. But I'm a Boer in bone and marrow, and proud of it."

She moved into his space, trying not to think of the state of her dress. "I know you are," she said, inches from his face now. "And there's no shame in that. But this sort of extremism has never helped the Afrikaner. Slagtersnek, Jopie Fourie...Where did their sacrifice get us? You're of much more use alive than six feet under."

"This time it's different." He made an effort to pull his face back; it caught the low sun and turned golden. "Did you know that as we speak there are thousands of people, around the country, armed and trained, even a new government – all waiting for our signal? I told you, we must just get through the next few hours and everything will change."

Anna couldn't believe what she was hearing. Fanus was somehow still convinced she would come around.

"Come, my lief. We'll have a great future together."

She felt like spitting on the floor between them. Instead she let her chin drop to her chest, watched the heave and fall of her breast. "I'm sorry," she said. "If I've made this harder for you than it already is." She managed to quiver her lip when she looked up at him again. Her breasts were touching his chest and she could feel his leg on hers. "This must be a stressful time."

A thump on cement disrupted the moment. "The bliksem has disappeared," PJ said. "Can you believe it? There's a trail of blood on the sand, like it's a bokskiet, but no sign of the little bugger."

Fanus' voice hit a higher pitch than usual. "What do you mean, I thought you said you had him? He's injured and on foot. How could he get away? It's impossible."

"I'm telling you. I followed the trail to the tar. Next thing it was gone. No blood, nothing. I looked everywhere – there's nothing, I swear."

"So, what are you going to do about it?"

"Ag, I wouldn't worry. He probably crawled under a bush to die. Like the animal he is."

Fanus gazed out over the veld. The morning had heated to midday and there was a haze over the ocean beyond. "You'd better be right." They stood in a dearth of words as a cloud glided past overhead and then dissipated. Then there was a bumping over the ridge, growing louder until it materialised into the shape of a motorcar front-on, beneath a shimmer of air. It rolled and thumped across the grass and stone and drew up close by them. The door clocked open but no-one got out.

"It is time," Kurt's voice was clear and crisp. "Lock her up. We go."

Fanus walked up to the window, bent. "I'm not going anywhere without my woman."

"It is simple," Kurt said. "Soldiers only: our orders are clear."

"Yes, come on," PJ chimed. "You know she's trouble."

"I don't care what you guys think. I'll take responsibility."

"Nein. Einsteigen. Sofort. You only."

"I told you. No Anna, no Fanus. And we all know what will happen – or not happen – without me."

There was a ceasefire from speaking but the air was charged. It was one of those windless crystal days in the Cape where the sky is a darker blue than usual. A fine mist was rising from the furrowed breakers below.

"Get in. The girl goes in the middle. Remember, you are responsible."

"Why didn't you just kill me?" She whispered in Fanus' ear before climbing in. "It would be much simpler all round."

The sun was at its apogee and the glare off the mountainside was almost blinding.

"I told you." He turned enough to see her. "Every great man needs a strong woman by his side."

She stared. "Great? You?"

He ignored her jibe. "I'm still young."

The car's tires spun on the gravel as it pulled away up the hill. Behind them, a dust cloud hovered in the stillness. A handful of cars were parked in the lot overlooking the sea, windows rolled down. A pair of lovers sat arm-over-arm on a bench, a picnic basket at their feet.

"If you plan to scream," Kurt said. They were passing the radar tower; there was still no military guard in sight. "My recommendation is not to. That is, if you want your father to live."

"What do you mean?"

"This is obvious. You escape, your father will die."

"You're lying."

"And why is this?"

The air in the car was close and hot and Anna was battling for breath. "Because he's in safe custody, that's why."

Kurt glanced back. They were rounding the rump of the lion and the road was a tight curve with no shoulder. He had one hand on the steering wheel, the other, sleeves rolled, rested on the window frame. "Really?"

"Yes. In fact he's with the police. I arranged it myself." Then she remembered the phone tap, Margriet, her beacon of hope fading.

He chuckled. "We heard of this plan. You must forgive us; we arranged a small...distraction."

Anna lunged forward, ramming her forehead into his neck. He swore and the car lurched right, missing the ditch by inches. Then he overcorrected left, only straightening as they sped past the spire of the Kramat. Next thing, his hand was in the glove compartment and then a pistol in his left hand muzzle resting on the steering wheel. "Fanus: you control your girl or I will. Is this understood?"

They careened along the side of Lion's Head, through the pines, with the city sprawled down below to their left, the road rising and dropping off in turns. By the time the car, eased into the roundabout at Kloof Nek, Fanus had talked the German into replacing the pistol. Then there was no further talking as they dropped down the bends of Kloof Nek Road into the city's bowl.

When Anna heard the flicking of indicators at the intersection with Orange Street, she began to realise her hope in Fanus was in vain, the unthinkable a reality. People were about to die – important people, not in ones or twos but en masse, a slaughter of innocents. And all she had had to do to stop it was tell them, the authorities, drop her pride. The sense of failure was overwhelming.

As they passed the Michaelis campus before Hof Street and her block of flats a stab of nostalgia punctured the fog of guilt. Why couldn't she be at home again, looking forward to a day like any other, as Elizabeth would, of ignorance and comfort?

Next to her, Fanus bent down and rummaged about under the seat in front of him, pulling out what looked like an oversized pencil case. He slid the wooden top cover off and rummaged inside, and produced a box of safety matches and a miniature paraffin lamp without glass. It wasn't hard to imagine what it would be used for and it smelled of death.

Within minutes they'd turned left into Hatfield Street, lined by commercial buildings. There was a taxi ahead of them, going below the speed limit, but they kept a nervous stone's throw from it. Fanus struck a match and cupped it between his hands until it flamed. Then he lit the wick of the lamp and a squat flame flared. Satisfied, he clutched it to his lap with both hands and stared ahead.

Moments later the road opened up and they were on Stalplein, the red and white brick of Parliament diagonally opposite and to their left. Corridors of importance. An image of her father came to mind, puffed in his suit and briefcase in hand. She was certain Kurt had been lying and that he, at least, was safe, if only for now. It was an outlier of victory in a cluster of failures.

As the car bumped over the cobbles Anna thought through her options. Kurt would kill her, and her father, if she attempted to disrupt things. And what hope was there, anyway, with PJ and Fanus flanking? She could call for help, but that would end the same way. And yet doing nothing meant scores of innocents would die, the downfall, even, of her nation. It was the same insoluble dilemma. The only way out was to break it. She pointed at the flame. "That's what they hired you for, isn't it..? For your expertise, local knowledge. Tell me, how much did they pay you? Will it be worth it, Judas, when you sift your silver from the rubble? A life for a pound, two?"

"Listen. Nobody hires me."

The front tires hit a manhole cover and the contraption cleared air on his lap and the flame waned and flared.

"Oh yes? What then did they promise? Fame, glory – I thought you were a better man, Fanus Prinsloo. What does your father think? Will it make him proud?"

"It's got nothing to do with the old man. I answer to the Council, they make the rules."

Kurt sniggered.

"What are you laughing at?"

The German smiled remained as he leaned left on the steering wheel and then they were in Spin Street, the Groote Kerk ahead. "So," he said, "The Great Council...You think, in France, Monsieur Pétain makes the rules?"

The traffic had slowed them at Church Square, the unlit neon of the Sailor's Eye on the far side. She pictured her father, in the booth, slurping his coffee. Her attempts to persuade him. So much had happened since then, so many false dawns and despair. At least he would survive, even if dozens didn't. A flicker of relief snuffed by a deluge of guilt.

"Wait a minute." Fanus put the lamp on the floor and leaned forward, talking at Kurt's ear. "What did you just say? About Pétain." He shifted in his seat. "That's not what you told me at the quarry. South Africa is to be a Republic. Those were your words. Don't you—"

"Attention now." Kurt adjusted the rear mirror. He was wearing gloves now, the type used by racing drivers, and his grip was steady. "We must concentrate." The brakes were tapping as they approached the intersection with Parliament Street. "There will be time, later."

Fanus blew out the flame. "I'm not lifting a finger until you explain yourself."

Kurt leaned forward on the steering wheel, and brought the car to a standstill. He waited for a soldier with an orange flash on his shoulder to cross the street and then turned. The barrel of the pistol rested on the seat back and it was pointed at Fanus.

"My orders were precise. We must complete the mission. Now pick that up and light it again. I will give you twenty seconds." With his head still half-cocked, he rammed the gear lever in first. The car shuddered for a moment they were crawling left and into the shade of the oak bough with Parliament's paling on their right.

"Listen to Kurt," PJ said. "The bitch is just trying to divide us; can't you see that?"

Fanus grappled for the lamp.

"Don't," Anna breathed. "He's bluffing...They can't do it without you." The tires beneath them squelched on the cobbles below as the car eased up the street toward the entrance gate. She recognised the guard by his posture; his eyes were obscured by the straps of his helmet. "If that thing goes off it will bring the world running. Do the right thing, for my sake if it has to be, or your country. You're a patriot Fanus, I know you are, a true Afrikaner, you don't have to join in this...this devil's scheme." Then she noticed a car parked opposite the guard with two policemen in the front. And a glint, perhaps the barrel of a rifle, at the window. She thought of De Villiers. Then Kleinjan. Worked back the steps. Had there been enough time?

"I'm sorry," Fanus whispered back. He was holding the lamp again, the matchbox shaking in his hand. "We've been planning this too long to give it up now."

"Come on," PJ urged. "Do it." He rolled down his window and leaned out. "Slow down. That's it: second manhole, I marked it with an O."

Anna had tried many times to reconstruct her route through the tunnels to the room with the crates. In her mind's eye she imagined it further on, perhaps on Stalplein itself. That's what she'd told Thomas. Perhaps he'd been down there and discovered nothing. She cursed herself for carelessness.

"All right." Fanus opened his side door close to ninety degrees. The manhole was alongside the running board and within reach.

"That's our man." PJ felt under the seat, pulled out a crowbar. "Goed, let's do this manne." He glanced at the dashboard. "One minute, remember." He slid out of the car. Then his crowbar was under the manhole cover and he was groaning at it.

Fanus struck a match and at the same time his legs swung onto the same sideboard and then he was crouched on the cobbles.

Anna tensed, knew this could be the moment she could regret for all time. She was about to lunge when her eye caught the guard sauntering toward them. Seconds later he was bending over, helmet and eyes at the window.

"Quickly Fanus," PJ said, between breaths. The cover was vertical now and supported by the crowbar. "Thirty seconds left."

"Shut up," Kurt said. "You're making him nervous."

Anna leaned across to get a better view of Fanus. He was cradling the flame, still crouched, six feet from the manhole. But he seemed to be frozen in position, his whole body was shaking now.

"Come on." PJ was on all fours alongside him. "What's wrong?"

Fanus looked back. His face was red and sweating. "I...I want to. But I can't seem..."

"He's scared," PJ sneered. "Fok. Give it here then."

"Hey," the guard said, "What's going on back there?"

There was a silence.

"Oh." The guard smiled a blush. "Miss van der Vliet. I'm sorry. I didn't see you."

Anna was screaming without words.

"You all right ma'am?"

She was shaking her head but he wasn't seeing. "Just missed your father, you know. First time I've seen him late for session, mind..."

For a moment Anna was paralysed by dread. Afterward she marvelled at how time and motion had slowed, like an old soundless movie or a slideshow. The guard leaned closer, his eyes straying to the far side of the car. "Hey, what's that chap doing?"

She was viewing both scenes. Fanus slumped on the cobbles. PJ with the box of matches, striking another match. The end of an asbestos pipe at the manhole and the tousled end of a rope. There was less than three feet to the manhole. "Help," Anna mouthed.

"You there," the guard was saying. "Stand up."

PJ ignored him. The contraption was burning again. He shuffled it closer to the hole. Just inches to go now.

"This is a no-stop zone," the guard said, rifle at the ready. "Move on immediately." Then the car opposite burst its doors and the policemen were running.

"Stop him," Anna screamed as she threw her body out the door. The lamp's flame was receding toward the pipe. The pain from her knee as it hit the stone caused her to crumple at first, but she managed to twist herself around and kick at PJ with her good leg.

The jolt caused the lamp to fly forward from his hands, still burning, and tumble into the dark. So this is it, she remembered thinking, this is what it comes to, all and everything, the world as I know it is dammed.

A pistol appeared from the manhole and then became a hand. The steel cover was flung past vertical and clattered to the street. At first Anna's confusion overwhelmed her delight and then she was terrified again so she backed off toward the car.

"Lie." Thomas was out, one knee on the street, his pistol pointing at PJ. "I will only say it once."

His words were drowned by shouting, first of the guard, the police, and a familiar voice. Then boot steps pounded the cobbles, and there was a clang of a weapon dropped.

PJ had either not heard the warning or didn't care. Instead he cast around in confusion, then retreated to the car.

And then the unthinkable happened, a shot and Anna's heart was gaping as she watched Thomas stagger – first in a circle, then about the manhole and finally toward her and the car.

The hand that clasped her mouth in that instant smelled of perfume and gun oil and was steel. "Get away or she dies," Kurt was saying. His other arm was locked about her neck and his pistol was pointed at her temple.

Thomas appeared to hesitate, his pistol still in his hand.

De Villiers had appeared now, at the bonnet of the car. He was shouting a warning, and then Anna's ears pounded before the wisp of gun smoke. Something inside of her died as she watched Thomas crumple, and all fear was gone. She sank her teeth into Kurt's forearm with all her anger. His arm recoiled and the gun clanged to the stone and there was an eerie silence.

Thomas was on his knees again, at a crawl, his fingers stretching for the butt of the pistol. It was too much for Anna to process in the moment and she was a frozen spectator. Then there was another explosion and a scream and Thomas passed her, grappling for the front door. He heaved himself, groaning, into the driver's seat and panted. "Get out Anna," he shouted. "And away. It's me they want."

"How can I leave you like this?" She watched as the wet patch spread at his shoulder. Without thinking she reached over and felt and it was sticky. "You're hurt."

"Go, Anna. Now."

There was shouting at cross purposes between the guard and the police; De Villiers ordered the others to back off.

"Oh, my love, give yourself up. It's our only chance."

"What's the use?" He was heaving. "They'll hang me."

"No," she said. "Not after what you've just done."

"It's no good. A German's a German. Please. I must go. Alone."

"No." She wasn't moving. "How can I?"

Then a pistol was pointing at her. Thomas was serious as death and his face was pain-drained of colour. "I'm sorry," he said. He coughed and it was wet. "I will fight to the end."

De Villiers was several feet off from the bonnet. "Get out Anna, he shouted."

"Listen to him," Thomas whispered. "Please Anna..." His pistol was shaking. "Don't make me do this."

Anna shifted to the door, one arm out first, then a leg. Next thing De Villiers had her wrist and was yanking and she fell to the cobbles. She lay, helpless, listening to the engine scream and the surge of the car. A shot rang out, and another and the sound of a windscreen shattering filled the air. She propped herself on a hand and stared at the car accelerating through the glass, veering left and right, and then tearing across Stalplein. And then he was gone.

Chapter 34

Anna didn't try to move until long after the back of the car had vanished into traffic and a jungle of buildings. A confusion of shouting had broken out between the policemen and the guards that had rushed to the scene. One of de Villiers' men ran back to the car and took off across Stalplein in pursuit whilst another bolted up the stairs into Parliament. The latter reappeared a minute later, arms waving instructions and then there was a pause until the Prime Minister appeared, slow but proud despite being helped along by a younger man on either side. The entourage spilled down the stairs and onto the paving where they stopped to huddle under an oak. Then the trickle became a stream as one Member of Parliament after another came out of the entrance, interspersed with workers. But there was only one face that mattered to Anna and when she saw it she ran.

They met at the top of the stairs midway between the columns, standing apart, neither knowing whether to move first. Anna knew she should be angry at the man who would deny her future for point of pride. But looking at him all she could think of was how much smaller he somehow appeared, than his six foot five inch frame - diminished or had she grown? Then her arms were around him and they were hugging for the first time since her mother's funeral and it felt good.

At length he drew back a fraction to meet her face on, there was an expression she didn't recognise until much later, of admiration, and then it gave never left her. "My engel," he said. "I'm sorry. I should have listened to you. I'm so, so sorry."

She kept looking at him, not believing it was all over and he was unharmed. Then she threw her arms about him again and her cheek was at his chest. Not worrying that people were watching her and she was crying "Oh, Papa, you're safe."

When her sobbing had subsided they drew apart again. He appraised her and then ran a finger down her cheek and neck to her shoulder. "What's this? He dabbed at her dress. "Magtig, you're bleeding. Are you all right?"

Anna looked down. Her dress was splattered red over floral and there was a rip in the hem. "Don't worry." She glanced over his shoulder across Stalplein and then closer by, Government Avenue. A crowd had gathered about Kurt's body and a policeman was trying to keep them at bay. "It's the German's."

"Which one?" he said. For the first time he looked vulnerable, confused even. It was as though she was getting a glimpse of what he would look like as an old man.

"How much do you know?" she said.

He glanced this way and that. The last of the parliamentarians had exited the building and now the rest of the workers were gathering on the side of the grounds. Above, a squirrel corkscrewed in an oak until the branch it was on started to droop and then it jumped to the next. In the distance, the wail of a fire engine started up. He said, "Just the basics. What de Villiers had time to tell me when I arrived here. Ah, speak of the devil..."

The detective's hand rested on her shoulder before she turned.

"Ma'am."

His shirttail was hanging over his belt and his breathing was laboured. "You did well back there." He turned to her father. "You must be a proud man."

Her father laughed. "I'm too proud: that's just my problem. Seriously though: I couldn't hope for a better—"

She elbowed him. "There's no need to get all soft and squishy on us, Papa." She turned to include de Villiers. "Besides, it was nothing. I just did what was before me."

He took a cigarette from his pack and pressed it between his lips. "No, no," he said, padding his sides for matches. "You were so much more than that. Do you have any idea how many lives you saved?"

Then, though the sun was high and still breaking through the trees, she was shivering and had to hug herself for warmth. Below her a shoestring of ants was criss-crossing the paving. There were shots going off in her mind, scenes of cars replaying themselves, of cries and of blood. "Not just me." She was shaking her head with a faraway look. "Not just me."

At that moment the fire engine's wail rounded the corner of Church Square and made its way up Government Avenue. A safe zone had been cordoned off between the fencing and the Parliament buildings and policemen were herding parliamentarians and workers into cars. Finally, a jeep drew up at the side of the manhole and soldiers in uniform hopped out and clambered into the drain.

Anna shuddered, as if waking to worry. First she glanced at the mountain. The stone face was shimmering grey in the heat and there was a wisp of cloud at the top cable station. "Where's Kleinjan?" She swirled to face de Villiers. Panic rising. "Tell me he reached you."

De Villiers smiled. "Come," he said, taking her hand. "Both of you." He led them through the entrance gate to the car that the policemen had sprung from earlier. There were knots of stragglers, waiting for directions. The fire engine had quieted but its light was still flashing and firemen bustled about as if looking for something to do. De Villiers opened the rear door. "A lady has come to pay her respects," he said, bending to look in. "No, its fine, stay where you are."

Anna peered into the gloom of the car. His face was indistinct but the bandages slung about his neck reflected light. "Kleinjan?" Her hand fumbled for the door. "You had me worried, jong. For a time I thought you were dead."

"How he survived, no one knows," de Villiers said from behind. "By the time he got to City Hall he must have lost half his blood. And looks like he didn't have much to start with."

Anna ran her hand along the stitching of his bandages. "I'm sorry you had to go through this," she said. "I'm just so, so sorry. If I hadn't...How can I thank you? How can any of us."

"Haai, it's nothing. Just be thanking the Lord we're all safe."

"And to think I almost dismissed him out of hand," de Villiers said. "I did think his story was too much at first. I mean, the well and the tunnels and all that. Especially because he hadn't been there himself." He looked up at her father. "I checked it out, though. Sent my men to the Gardens, even down the well. They didn't see a thing. Luckily we posted the guard just in case."

Soon the last of the Members of Parliament had been evacuated. Only the party leaders remained to confer, outnumbered by policeman and soldiers with rifles at the ready. The drone of an airplane approached from the Cape Flats. Anna stood arm-in-arm with her father at the edge of the safe zone. She was staring in the direction of Stalplein and the mountain.

"What's the matter?" her father said. "You're still tense."

"Ag, its nothing."

"You're worried about Thomas, aren't you?"

She nodded. "He was losing blood; his leg; He needs to get to a hospital."

"Don't worry, they've set roadblocks at every major arterial out of Cape Town. A national alert. De Villiers here tells me they'll have him before nightfall."

"I wouldn't be so sure," she said, looking at the detective but taking nothing in. "He's as tough as biltong." Then she was fighting a wave of weariness, and had an urge to sit. "He won't go down without a fight, you know. Besides, why chase him? You know that if it wasn't for Thomas none of us would be standing here? Can't you let him be?"

De Villiers shook his head as if shrugging off the thought of a ghost. "That's not possible. We've got a job to do." The hub-hub of people on the street had grown louder. Reporters were now on the scene, cameras weighing from their necks. A flash poofed off and a policeman jumped to attention and shooed them away. "But don't worry. There were extenuating circumstances. And Smuts isn't stupid. He knows how deeply German sympathies run in the volk. He'll pardon him."

"I want to believe you," she said. "But I can't. It's too awful."

"You're in love with him, aren't you?" her father said.

"Oh, Papa, I don't know. I couldn't bear to lose him, not again. Is that what love is?"

He stared across at the building opposite. The air had become heavy between them, like a blanket of sadness.

"It's her, isn't it?" she said. You're thinking of Mama."

He nodded. "They say time dulls the pain... He looked at her and there was water around his eyes. Then he smiled, his dimples like chevron trenches. "Well they're wrong." He paused, eyeing her. "You know what?" He helped a strand of her hair behind her ear. "You get more and more like her the older you get." Then his face grew sadder still and he looked at the mountain. The dot of a cable car crawled its upward trajectory.

Anna put her arm about him. "Well, at least you've still got me." Her back stiffened and she removed her arm. "And, I suppose...Margriet."

He looked at her. "No. It's over."

"Oh?"

"Yes, and none too soon. I'm sorry, Engel, I should have listened to you."

"It's all right," she said. "It's not like I don't want you to find love. You know that, hey? There's nothing I'd rather see than you happy again and laughing, like when..."

"Ja, ja. It's just...no-one comes even close to Julia."

"I know, but you must promise me you'll try. You need another woman in your life, Papa. I know you. Especially now that I'm away..." Anna felt a sadness so strong it was impossible to hide.

"What is it, Engel?"

She couldn't bring herself to look him.

He took her hand. "Forgive me," he said. "I had no business threatening you like that. You still want your degree that badly...go, you have my blessing." Then he smiled. "You'll visit me in the holidays, though, won't you?"

"As long as there aren't any foreign agents."

They laughed. At length they fell to silence, watching the emergency services continue their clean up. A set of stretcher bearers had just emerged from the huddle on the street, their loads covered by tarpaulins, faces grim. They made toward a Bedford parked at the edge of the square. The motions had given her an idea and it grew as they stood there watching.

"Would you mind much," she said. "If I went back to Rietvlei now, just for a few days?"

His eyebrow lifted. "What about lectures? Can't miss those."

"Only one day. Monday. Please, Papa, it's been such a crazy time: I need to gather my thoughts."

He considered her for several seconds. "Of course. I'll arrange a driver." He bent down and peered in the car. "There you go. Kleinjan can go too: A bit of fresh sea air will do our wounded soldier no end of good. And I'll tell you what, you should stay over on the way – it's so much more relaxing."

Chapter 35

The sun had barely started warming the Eastern sky when they rumbled along the blue gum-lined drive leading from the Houw Hoek Inn to the road. In the rear mirror, only the tops of the hotel's gables were visible above the mist that hung in the valley. In front of them the outline of a cow showed in the whiteness, head buried in a meadow.

Anna willed the car faster, her spirits rising with every bend they rounded up the pass until the road flattened. As they crested the neck, the view beyond opened up to a patchwork of brown and golden wheat-fields on undulating hills ringed by mountains. "Ah, isn't that lovely?" she said. "I can't believe it's only been a week."

"Ja," Kleinjan echoed. "My heart gets sore." They drank in the splendour of the Overberg as the car sank curve by curve down the pass. Only when they'd settled into a gentle rollercoaster through the hills did he speak again. "You still hope to find him, not so?"

She nodded. "You know me too well." They summited a hill. The wheat field was waist high, and here and there patches had already been harvested and gathered to bales. A trail of guinea fowl rose from the stubble and crossed overhead.

"What makes you think he hasn't left yet?"

"He wouldn't have lied," she said. "No, he'll be there. I know it."

"And if you find him? What will Miss Anna do then?"

They were in a dale, passing through wisps of mist still floating on the stream. A farmstead appeared by the side of the road. Abandoned implements littered its werf. "I don't honestly know," she said. "Oh, Kleinjan. What am I to do?"

"Toemaar," he said. "You'll know. The Spirit will guide you."

They were quiet for the next hour as the car wound its way through the hills. Then it started to descend in degrees, winding toward the hamlet of Napier. A sheaf of bark dropped on the windscreen and a fragment settled at the bonnet and there was a smell of resin in dry air. Then Anna could see the tip of the church's steeple through the forest of blue-gum.

"The Akkedisberg to Elim, or the Bredasdorp road?" the driver asked. He'd been silent since dawn.

"Elim," she said and turned to Kleinjan. "But no stopping to chinwag, you hear me."

He laughed. "Foot down," he said to the driver. "Can't you see the lady's in a hurry?"

They were entering the downs and the fynbos from a distance looked like the heather and moorlands of Yorkshire. There must have been recent showers because there were impromptu vleis here and there and stagnant water beside the road. At the Rietvlei turnoff Anna tensed. What she'd dreamed of since leaving Cape Town had taken form. "You didn't tell anyone, did you Kleinjan?"

A buzzard flapped its wings from its perch on the telephone line and rose. It fought the breeze toward the coast where the ocean was still a simmer above the velt. "Miss Anna really...I gave you my word. Will you never trust me again?"

"It's not that. It's just that I have a bad feeling. There's no good reason for it, I know, but..."

"You mean the police? You're worried they'll find us?"

"They'll come eventually," she said. "But no. They wouldn't expect him to be here. It's way too obvious. Think about it." She laughed. "The man would have to be crazy."

Kleinjan smiled. "He's not mad to like you."

"That's kind."

They rumbled along the gravel in silence. Dust billowed behind the car before being dispersed by the wind.

"Did he say what time?" Kleinjan said.

"Not exactly. But they'll wait for the sun to set."

"That makes sense," he said. They continued. The vibrations made her feel sleepy; she had to fight to keep her eyelids open. "You know, Miss Anna, I've been thinking. How would Thomas tell his crew if the plan changed?"

She turned to him. "Of all people, you should have figured that one out."

He thought some. Then said, "You mean the missionary at Elim?" He shook his head. "Jinne, I'm slow today."

The road had narrowed to a single jeep track with proteas on either side. The car veered left and sharp right in a drift of sand and the driver swore as the car wiggled back to level ground. The sun was directly above them and now that there was no longer a dust cloud trailing them so they'd rolled the windows down for air.

"Slow down," Anna said, touching the driver on the shoulder. She was pointing to a track that forked right toward the ocean. "Kleinjan: isn't that the one to Skulpiestrand?"

The car idled to a standstill. When the dust had settled some, Kleinjan got out. He walked about the bonnet and stooped over a track. "Come," he called. "Look here." He had a stick in his hand and held its end over the mark of a tire. "This was made today or yesterday. After the rains."

There could only be one explanation. Anna felt a hole was opening in her stomach, like the anxiety she used to feel before the hundred yard final at her school athletics day. "Wait here with the car," she said. "Or continue on to the house. I'm going on foot."

"Haai, I can't leave you like this."

"You can if I tell you to."

"With respect, Miss Anna. I'm not letting you go alone, not until I'm sure it's just Thomas."

She was about to say something but waited. He was just feet from her, one eye looking at her, the other squinted shut to the sun. He held up a hand as a shield. "All right," she said at last. "But only if you promise to give us some time alone."

He smiled. "I have no problem making myself invisible."

Anna returned to the car to collect her water bottle and hat and they set off. The track was a mile at least and straight as far as the bush marking the edge of the sea. The C of Skulpiestrand's cove was

just discernible beyond and the ocean a wider swathe and grey blue like steel. Soon the shape of the car dipped below the horizon behind them and it felt like they were alone at the end of the world.

The sand was thick in parts and Anna had to shift to the firm ground of the middelmannetjie to keep pace. They were closing in on the bush at the spring tide mark now and could hear the song of cicadas. To the left of the track something rustled in the grass and was gone. Otherwise the silence of the sun beat down on them until it started to be drowned out by the approaching rumble of breakers.

After twenty more minutes of marching, the smell of kelp became overpowering and Anna could tell from the crashing and fine spray of sea air that they were close. Over the next half rise the track they were on merged with another and the bushes thinned. Then the sand changed to pebbles and dry kelp crackled underfoot and she knew any moment they'd see the roof of the stone cottage tucked under the lee of the promontory.

Anna's heartbeat raced when she saw the car. It was parked in the clearing before the beach, both back doors open. She stepped forward.

"Wait," Kleinjan said, grabbing her by the wrist. "First, we watch."

Nothing happened for a long time as the sun beat silence on the land and the sea. Overhead, a seagull circled over the bay and swooped to land on a rock. Then there was a whisper of wind and it was still again. The door of the cottage creaked on its hinges, half closed and then stopped. Too sad to weep, Anna stood and watched.

"It looks like we're too late," he said. "I'm sorry."

"I won't believe it," Anna said. "I simply won't. Say, what time is it?"

Kleinjan squinted at the sun, his lips moving. "I would say two, two-thirty. I am sorry."

They edged closer to the car, anyway. From their angle of approach it was impossible to see inside. Anna reached it first, not wanting to hope. She craned her neck toward the open door. There was a stench of sweat and something putrid.

The voice from inside startled them.

"What took you so long?" It was Thomas, faint.

She moved closer to get full view. He was lying on the back seat, feet dangling over the edge, his head propped on a coat that had been folded against the other door.

"My dear...oh, my dear," she cried. "What's happened to you?" She put a hand on his leg. It was hotter than the air. A blood-soaked shirt was tied about his thigh and he was naked and glistening to the waist.

"Do you have water?" he grimaced. "I forgot to pack."

"Kleinjan, did you remember..." She retracted her head, straightened, and turned.

The beach was deserted. She swore and waited to think. A bird alighted from the bushes and otherwise it was still. Then she saw the water bottle. It was on the ground, next to an arrow scrawled in the sand. Anna smiled at the message. Kleinjan's hand writing. He was gone to get the car, a gentleman to his core.

Thomas held the bottle with both hands but still it trembled, so hard at his lips that water spilled down his neck and pooled in a hollow of his chest. She was shocked then at how pallid he had become and shrunk.

"Magtig, it's too hot in here," she said. "Come, I'll help you move to the shade."

"I can still function at least." He shifted to upright. Soon some colour had returned to his cheeks but there was still pain under his smile. "You should not write me off, not yet."

"What are you doing here?" she said, supporting him under his armpits. "Like this."

"Waiting, is all. He peered to the dashboard clock, then beyond to the sun, which was a handbreadth from the horizon. "It won't be long now."

She poked at his shoulder. It was soft and sticky. "You're still bleeding," she said. "Couldn't your crew have picked you up by now?"

He shook his head in slow motion. "The missionary wasn't there, in Elim I mean. Something must have happened. But it is no problem. We will simply wait for sundown." A fly landed on his bandage, then another. He brushed them aside but they rose and dropped back to a splatter of blood.

"Come," he said. "There's something I'd like to show you."

His bad leg dragged as he struggled up the rocky outcrop. At every second step he stopped to catch his breath. At last they arrived at a ledge where Thomas slumped, panting. They positioned themselves to face the ocean. Then Thomas pointed to a dark shape in the shimmer of the sea, one third across the offing. It could have been a shark's fin or a whale, had it been closer.

"What is it?"

"It's the conning tower," he said. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"If you say so."

A seagull appeared overhead, quivering in place to the breeze. In a flash it had dropped splashing to the water, only to appear, empty beaked, a moment later.

"They'll be lowering the dingy about now," he said.

She tried to focus on the whale-like shape in the water. It was black and, except for the rectangular chimney of the conning tower, a flat bulge just a fraction above the surface. By instinct she looked up to the sky, horizon to horizon. "What about the patrols?"

"No need to worry. They only fly every two hours."

She stared at him. "You mean...last week on the dunes...you were timing them?"

"Also, you must know by now. I measure everything."

She put her hand through the crook of his arm; their sides were pressed against one another. She elbowed him gently. "Even your women?"

He laughed, drew her closer. "Only the most beautiful." Then he turned, caught her eyes. "Tell me: have you reconsidered my proposal?"

A wave rolled in and shucked on the pebbles on the beach below and to the left. The sea before the rocks was uneasy and breaking out of turn. Everywhere, it was just rock and sea and sky. Nothing distinct, as if it was a dream.

"My darling—I can call you that, can't I...?" She rested her head on his shoulder.

"Of course."

"I would want nothing more than to spend forever with you." From behind them the seagull swooped overhead again dived into a rock pool and this time rose with a mussel in its beak. She watched the bird settle on a rock shelf. "But it can't work. Not now. You know that."

He put his arm around her, hugged her tight.

"Doesn't your wound hurt when you do that?" she said.

"Of course not," he said. "I'm a soldier, remember." He ran his finger through her hair, sweeping it back. His mouth was at her ear. "A German soldier. We don't have feelings."

She turned to him, examined his body. His shoulders were sinew and muscle and his chest smooth and glistened in the near horizontal sun. "My Nordic God."

"Don't get carried away."

She laughed. "Indulge me. Just this once." She snuggled closer.

"And you," he said. "You'd be my angel. If an angel could be a woman." His finger was at the shoulder of her dress. She felt the skin on her collarbone tingle in the wind "My darling. Oh. Oh, why must this end?"

"Don't think about it. Not now." He ran his lips from her chin to the base of her neck and stopped. His other hand was at her back, her bra strap, hurried now, working. Then the air was warm on her breasts and it felt wonderful and her eyes rested on the ripples of the approaching sea.

"When the war is over," he said. "I'll be back. On my life, we'll be together." He pulled her toward him and they were kissing and their bodies became one with the stone and the sky and nothing else mattered.

After that it was still. An oystercatcher hopped on the rock close by them, beak red and with angry eyes. A wave wooshed and sucked on the stones and Thomas was staring at the mouth of the cove. The dingy was close to entering.

From beyond his shoulder Anna's eye caught a needle of dust rising beyond the mountain, bent in the almost breeze. She quivered. "No. That could be the police. How did they know?"

He turned to look. They could make out a car at the head of the dust, speeding along the gravel road toward the base of the mountain. Perhaps six miles away.

"Come." He winced as he rose. "We say goodbye at the bottom."

Anna watched the dingy put-put through the water toward the beach. Then she glanced back toward the track. The dust column was larger now.

The boat slowed to a halt with engine still running, and the two seamen hopped off and ploughed through the shallows. They ran up the beach toward the car, calling in German. When they got there they cast about in confusion.

“Hier.” Thomas called out to them from the last rock ledge before the beach. “Hilfe. Macht schnell.”

They helped him down and propped him up either side of them. He twisted his neck to face Anna. “There’s something I forgot to tell you,” he said.

“Don’t,” she said. “I know you do.”

And then they turned and they were down the beach and in the dingy.

Inland, the sound of tires on gravel grew above the sea. The dust was almost upon them.

“They’re here,” she called. “I’ll try and slow them. Just go.” She watched the dingy chug through the mouth of the cove.

Behind her the car skidded to a halt at the spring tide shelf. Boots got out and crunched on shell.

The boat was just beyond the cove. Anna could still make out the three figures, Thomas seated on the bow. Later, she would remember what looked like a hand lifted in a salute, held there and dropped. The dingy rose and fell over a swell, surged forward and was in open sea.

She turned to the steps, looked up at the towering figure. “Papa?”

“Looks like my timing was spot on.” He raised a hand and waved it to sea. “Hope you told him goodbye from me.”

“You knew?” She stood, staring at her father. He was smiling and confident, as though he’d recaptured the essence of himself.

He nodded, not breaking his stare at the ocean. The sun was a watery orange disc bulging on the horizon. It was impossible to make out the U-boat in the fading light.

“Why didn’t you try to stop me,” she said. “If you knew? I could have run off, almost did.”

“I never got to understand you,” he said, still facing the water. The seagull was there again, circling over the beach, and its caw sounded like a plea. He shook his head in slow motion. There was only the grumble of waves now. “No. I didn’t even try.”

Epilogue

After boarding his submarine (U851) without incident, Korvettenkapitän Thomas von Eisenheim dispatched an enigma-encoded communique to naval headquarters in Berlin to confirm the delivery of Obersturmführer Kurt Streicher to Afrikaner partisans on an unmarked landfall at latitude S34°46'. The message went on to say that, despite repeated attempts by the undersigned, the SS officer had failed to reconnoitre at the agreed place and time, and was therefore presumed either killed or captured. With enemy agents closing in, the note ended, it was therefore decided to leave South African territorial waters without delay.

A subsequent investigation by the Sicherheitsdienst into the failure of the fascist revolution in the Union of South Africa cleared Thomas von Eisenheim of any culpability and reinstated his command. After participating in manoeuvres with a squadron of Japanese submarines in the South China Sea, he was assigned to a wolf pack in the North Atlantic. With a tally of 24 allied merchant ships sunk for a total of 165,231 tons, von Eisenheim went on to become one of the Kriegsmarine's most successful U-boat commanders in the Second World War. His bravery under sustained depth charging by American destroyers in an attack on a Cuban naval base, led to him being awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class in February 1943.

Thomas's military career was interrupted however, when he, along with Claus von Stauffenberg and 7,000 others, was arrested by the Gestapo on suspicions of involvement in the failed July plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. But thanks to the intervention of an uncle in the Reichskanzlei, he was one of the 2,020 alleged conspirators to be spared the death sentence – and spent the rest of the war in Spandau Prison in Berlin. After a three month debriefing by Allied intelligence agencies, the young officer was released. He took the first available passage to Cape Town.

For the duration of his campaigns, Thomas had made a point of sending Anna a letter from every neutral port he entered, always under a different pseudonym. Though by necessity vague, the messages confirmed his unwavering devotion, and the certainty of their ultimate union.

Anna for her part, completed her Bachelor's degree at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Arts, graduating in December 1943. At the urging of Professor Pickford-Dunn, she volunteered to join the Special Signal Corp and, after a one month training course on Robben Island, spent the remainder of the war as a radar cadet, working and sleeping in the Castle of Good Hope.

At every opportunity, Anna returned to Rietvlei, whether or not her father was in residence. There, it would be a safe bet to find her sitting before her easel, painting landscapes. The first of these, an oil painting of Skulpiestrand at sunset, still hangs in the farm's voorkamer alongside a portrait of her late mother.

On a Sunday morning in late September 1945, Anna opened the front door of her apartment to find Thomas standing on the patio, weighed down by a bunch of King Proteas wrapped in fynbos greens. Her first response was to smile, and then chide him for taking so long. By the end of the summer they were married by Dominee de Wet in the Dutch Reformed Church of Bredasdorp. Though the bride's father wore tinted glasses as he walked her down the aisle, it was impossible for a bystander not to notice his tears. The reception was a highlight of the Overberg social calendar and was held in a marquee tent on the beach. Festivities continued until long after the sun rose over the dunes.

With what remained of Thomas' European inheritance, the couple bought a wild flower farm in the Elim Downs, ten miles as the Fish Eagle flies from Rietvlei. From there they pioneered the export

industry of Cape wild flowers to European capitals. They had four children within the space of six years, all of them boys. In time, the youngsters became fluent in English, German and Afrikaans.

Stefan van der Vliet was held in custody for three months following the failed coup d'etat. The state's charges of treason for aiding the enemy were, however, dropped before the end of the year. To this day, no one knows why. But rumours that General Jan Smuts had personally intervened, were never disproven. Van der Vliet retired from politics shortly after his release from prison to devote himself to farming. After experimenting with a herd of cattle for two years of drought and loss, he decided to revert to the predictability of sheep. But throughout it all, he never failed to take his breakfast at nine o'clock sharp. As always it included three eggs, fried sunny side up.

Fanus Prinsloo was convicted in the Cape High Court of treason for his involvement in the plot to overthrow the government and was sentenced to death by hanging. After a high-profile media campaign by conservative politicians and right wing organisations, including the Ossewa Brandwag, the prime minister commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. After the National Party came to power in the 1948 general elections he, along with other political detainees, were released, and entered service in the Attorney General's office in Pretoria. Following the death of his father, he retired from public life to run the family's business and farming interests. From time to time he would run into Thomas and Anna at agricultural shows and similar community events, but the conversation seldom ventured beyond commentary on the weather.

Kleinjan soon retired from his role as foreman at Rietvlei, but only after persuading Anna's father to abandon the ill-fated cattle venture and refocus on Merino sheep. He and Hannah moved back to Elim, where they lived in a north-facing cottage in the Main Road. There, he remained teetotal and never failed to attend church on Sunday mornings. Their son Willem returned from his transport duties in Egypt in 1945, and after his meagre war allowance was depleted, made ends meet by doing contract work for local farmers. He would sometimes stop by the von Eisenheim homestead between transports to enjoy a cup of Rooibos tea with his childhood friend. It was a strange sight in those parts but there was never an awkward silence.